

Supporting learners' higher-order literacy skills

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- Audience** Secondary school teachers and senior managers; local authorities; and national bodies with an interest in education.
- Overview** This document is designed to assist teachers to recognise and promote higher-order reading and writing skills in particular within Key Stages 3 and 4. It provides examples of learners' work characteristic of reading and writing within National Curriculum Levels 7 to Exceptional Performance. The examples are accompanied by commentary and task-setting ideas.
- The resources are based on best practice in English school departments. They can also support learning, teaching and assessment of literacy across the curriculum.
- Action required** Schools' senior managers and subject leaders, and local authority advisers, are requested to raise awareness of this new resource within their school departments, and to encourage teachers to use the materials to support their focus on securing and improving learners' literacy skills.
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Foreword

We all know that good literacy skills are fundamental to success in life for everyone. They underpin effective learning in English, Welsh and across the curriculum. They are vital to good communication, they unlock doors to enjoyment, employment and well-being, and they help to enable people to play their full part as citizens in today's society.

We have done a great deal over the years, through a range of initiatives, to support learners who have the least well-developed literacy skills, and we need to continue to work hard to improve on this. But we have so far given relatively little attention to boosting the literacy skills of our higher attaining pupils. This publication is aimed at filling that gap.

Results of national and international assessments – Key Stage 3, GCSE and PISA in particular – point to the fact that more able students in Wales are not generally developing their literacy skills to their full potential. So these materials, aimed at pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4, have been created in collaboration with a number of experts in schools and LEAs. We are confident that by using the materials schools will be able to help their students achieve better results across a wide range of subjects at GCSE and beyond.

Feedback from regional meetings is that teachers and local authorities warmly welcome this focus on higher-order literacy. I am delighted to commend these materials to all schools and to confirm our intention to build on the start that they offer.

David Hawker
Director, DCELLS

Introduction

Why has this guidance been produced, focusing on pupils at the top of the ability range?

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to challenging underachievement in schools and, specifically in this project, to raising performance in reading and writing among our more able pupils.

Underachievement occurs in pupils of all abilities though it is perhaps most easily identified in the work of the less able. There are a considerable number of strategies in schools to raise the standard of work of pupils who are under-achieving and under-attaining, often through differentiated work that targets pupils working at Levels 3 and 4 in a mixed-ability class or through teaching these pupils in small groups with specialised support. It is less common for teachers to stretch more able pupils who might also be under-achieving, even though their attainment is at the expected level or above. If we are to raise standards, it will be necessary to raise expectations, to target those who are 'coasting' and to challenge them to show their true potential.

Recent research has shown that teachers tend to praise pupils who produce work at high levels (Level 7, for example) but do not always encourage them to progress or suggest the best ways to improve. Marking tends to consist of comments such as 'Excellent', or 'Very mature work' and rarely identifies areas of possible refinement. It is ironic that these pupils are often the very ones who could cope with such suggestions and implement them.

The pieces of work in this guidance aim to exemplify what can be achieved at the highest levels and to provide commentaries that will help teachers to identify the characteristics of pupils' work at Levels 7, 8 and Exceptional Performance. It is hoped that this will provide a stimulus for teaching, and will encourage effective day-to-day assessment based on assessment for learning principles, so that performance reported in future summative assessments at Key Stages 3 and 4 will be raised.

If performance in reading and writing is raised in English, there should also be a subsequent similar effect on standards of achievement in other subjects across the curriculum. The communication skills of reading and writing, along with oracy, are essential to pupils' understanding of written, electronic and graphic resources and to their ability to express ideas and conclusions with clarity and accuracy in written work. When pupils learn how to demonstrate high levels of reading and writing skills consistently in English they will be able to transfer these skills and apply them to all their work. This effect will be enhanced if all subject teachers are aware of the characteristics of higher level reading and writing and have appropriately high expectations.

What characterises higher level reading and writing?

Reading

Effective reading is concerned with a search for meaning within an increasingly challenging range of texts. Pupils need to be aware of the purpose of their reading and to realise that books/texts may be read for pleasure, for information, for instruction, for verification and so on.

When reading for different purposes, the fluent and effective reader will develop and refine different strategies that make it possible to:

- read closely as when absorbing information
- read thoughtfully as when pondering over a poem
- read aloud for others and themselves
- skim a text to gain an overall impression
- scan to find a particular item of information
- read imaginatively as when visualising or recreating things or situations described
- read responsively and actively as when following or predicting the course of a narrative
- read critically as when assessing the force of an opinion or argument
- read analytically as when analysing the writer's use of language
- read appreciatively, recognising the writer's skill in using ideas, techniques and effects
- read with an awareness of the writer's viewpoint, distinguishing it from the behaviour and attitudes of a character

- realise that a text does not always mean what it says, understanding the nature of irony and ambiguity and accepting the existence of multiple levels of meaning in a text
- select appropriate books and read in order to elicit information from a number of texts, identifying key points, collating information, making comparisons and synthesising material from different sources
- evaluate what they read in terms of quality, effect and reliability.

Writing

Effective writing is concerned with expressing ideas, thoughts and emotions with clarity, coherence and fluency in a wide range of forms and styles. It is adapted to suit its audience and purpose and is accurate in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

When writing for different purposes, the fluent and effective writer will develop and refine different strategies that make it possible to:

- write in a way that engages the reader and sustains the reader's attention and interest
- write confidently and with control, showing flair and originality
- adapt their writing to suit the audience and purpose of the piece, making choices in style and register
- choose the appropriate form for the task, realising that some writing must be concise and that some needs to be extended and sustained
- experiment with language, form and structure to achieve a particular effect
- write fiction/literary texts where characters, events, feelings and settings are developed, imaginative and creative
- write non-fiction texts where ideas are organised and coherent and provide a clear point of view
- sustain an argument and offer convincing evidence to support their opinion
- show awareness of varying degrees of formality in writing and use standard forms except where non-standard forms are required for effect or technical reasons
- analyse and evaluate their own and others' writing
- use a wide range of sentence structures to enhance the fluency and variety of their writing
- organise coherent, grammatically accurate texts, using paragraphs effectively

- choose and use a wide range of vocabulary with precision
- use the full range of punctuation to clarify meaning and create effect
- spell accurately
- reflect on what they have written, drafting, editing and finding ways to improve their writing
- present writing in the way that best suits the task using appropriate features of layout and presentation including ICT.

Contents

This guidance contains examples of pupils' work that demonstrate features characteristic of performance at Levels 7, 8 and Exceptional Performance. The work was collected from schools across Wales in September/October 2008. While it is acknowledged that reading can be assessed effectively through oral responses, the pack only provides evidence of written responses. The focus here, therefore, is on the attainment targets, Reading and Writing. This does not, however, reduce the need for teachers to plan lessons that integrate the teaching of oracy, reading and writing since the three modes of language are interconnected.

The guidance contains written responses to reading and examples of pupils' writing at each of Levels 7, 8 and Exceptional Performance. Each piece is accompanied by a bullet-pointed commentary that aims to identify its strengths and areas for development. There are:

- five examples of responses to literary texts
- six responses to non-literary texts
- six examples of fiction/literary writing
- six examples of non-literary writing.

Comparisons of poetry by Angelou and Hesketh and Larkin and Frost, examination of Dahl's creation of tension and climax in two of his short stories, presentation of character by Zephaniah in his novel *Face*, and an examination of key themes in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, make up the collection of responses to literary texts. Leaflets, articles and speeches supply the stimulus for response to non-literary reading.

The writing samples include imaginative/personal, narrative, descriptive, discursive and persuasive pieces aimed at a range of audiences and presented in a variety of forms.

It should be remembered that some pupils achieve different levels in one or more of the three attainment targets for English – Oracy, Reading and Writing. This point is clearly made in the recent report, *Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years* (Estyn, 2008) where reading standards were found to exceed those for writing in the work of a significant number of pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3. For reporting purposes, end of key stage teacher assessments will provide an overall, ‘best fit’ level in English for each pupil. However, as part of any in-house evaluation of the details of pupils’ achievement, schools/departments should undertake an audit of pupils’ attainment in individual attainment targets to see whether performance in any one attainment target is different from that in the others.

Task setting to promote higher level responses

When setting tasks, teachers should:

In Reading

- Choose texts that assess the whole range of reading skills: location and selection of detail; a range of inferential skills; appreciation of a writer’s choice of language.
- Choose texts with an appropriate level of demand and linguistic challenge that can elicit detailed analysis and a well-developed personal and critical response.
- Ensure that learners have opportunities to explore the full range of texts – information, reference and other non-literary texts including print, media, moving image and computer-based materials.

In Writing

- Use reading and oral work as an introduction to writing so that learners have the opportunity to respond to appropriate stimuli and to develop their ideas through talk, rehearsing what they want to communicate before they write.
- Ensure that learners clearly identify the audience and purpose of the writing. This will allow them to make appropriate choices about form, language, tone and presentation.
- Ensure that learners have opportunities to compose and refine a wide range of text types – explanation, instruction, recount, report, persuasion, discussion as well as creative and imaginative work – manipulating the text to create the desired effect.

Level descriptions

Attainment target 1: Oracy

Level 7

Pupils are confident in the demands of matching their talk to different contexts. They use vocabulary precisely and organise their talk to communicate clearly. They express opinions and select evidence to support their views. In discussion, pupils make significant, sensitive and thoughtful contributions, evaluating others' ideas and varying how and when they participate. They are able to evaluate the quality of participation and performance and make salient points about ways to improve. They show confident use of standard English in situations that require it.

Level 8

Pupils maintain and develop their talk coherently and purposefully in a range of contexts. They structure what they say clearly, using apt vocabulary and appropriate intonation and emphasis. They consider information from various sources and use evidence in a balanced way to justify opinion. They make a range of contributions and are able to take a leading role, showing that they have listened perceptively and are sensitive to the development of discussion. They are able to evaluate, adapt and improve talk through insightful comment and response to their own and others' participation and performance. They show confident use of standard English in a range of situations, adapting their talk as necessary.

Exceptional Performance

Pupils select and use structures, styles and registers appropriately in a range of contexts, varying their vocabulary and expression confidently for a range of purposes. They initiate and sustain discussion through the sensitive use of a variety of contributions. They take a leading role in discussion and listen with concentration and understanding to varied and complex speech. They are able to recognise and evaluate features of talk and make sensitive and discerning suggestions about how to improve. They show assured and fluent use of standard English in a range of situations and for a variety of purposes.

Attainment target 2: Reading

Level 7

Pupils show understanding of the ways in which meaning and information are conveyed in a range of texts. They articulate personal and critical responses to literary and non-literary texts, showing awareness of their thematic, structural, linguistic and visual features. They select and synthesise a range of information from a variety of sources.

Level 8

Pupils' response is shown in their appreciation of and comment on a range of texts. They analyse and evaluate how particular effects are achieved through the use of linguistic, structural and presentational devices. They select, analyse and synthesise information and ideas, commenting on the ways in which they are presented in different texts.

Exceptional Performance

Pupils confidently sustain their responses to a demanding range of texts, developing their ideas and referring in detail to aspects of language, structure and presentation. They make apt and careful comparison between texts, including consideration of audience, purpose and form. They identify and analyse argument, opinion and alternative interpretations, making cross-references where appropriate.

Attainment target 3: Writing

Level 7

Pupils' writing is confident and shows appropriate choices of style in a range of forms. Writing is coherent, sustained and developed. In literary writing, characters and settings are developed and, in non-literary writing, ideas are organised and coherent. They sustain arguments and offer convincing evidence in support of their views. A range of sentence structures and vocabulary are accurately and effectively used. Spelling is correct, including that of complex irregular words. Paragraphing and correct punctuation are used for clarity and effect. Work is legible and well presented.

Level 8

Pupils' writing shows the selection of specific features or expressions to convey particular effects and to interest the reader. Flair and originality is evident within their written work. Literary writing shows control of characters, events and settings and shows variety in structure. Non-literary writing is coherent and gives clear points of view. They structure their arguments, offering evidence consistently. The use of vocabulary and grammar enables fine distinctions to be made or emphasis achieved. Writing shows a clear grasp of the effective use of punctuation and paragraphing. Work is legible and well presented.

Exceptional Performance

Pupils' writing has shape and impact and shows control of a range of styles, maintaining the interest of the reader throughout. Literary writing uses structure as well as vocabulary for a range of imaginative effects, and non-literary writing is coherent, reasoned and persuasive. A variety of grammatical constructions and punctuation is used accurately and appropriately and with sensitivity. Paragraphs are well constructed and linked in order to clarify the organisation of the writing as a whole. Work is legible and well presented.



1

Reading – response to literary texts

1. Roald Dahl short stories (features of Level 7)

Show how Roald Dahl creates tension and leads the reader towards a dramatic, if unexpected, ending in “The Landlady” and “Mrs. Bixby and the Colonels Coat”

Roald Dahl is one of the greatest writers of all time. He thrills and captures readers imaginations, keeping them guessing to the very end. His stories are witty and humorous and make you want to read them again and again. In this essay I will be looking at his “snapper stories”. A snapper story is a short story that has a short sharp ending that often you do not expect. The ending may not actually tell you directly what has happened but will be implied. A good snapper story normally contains; red herrings, irony, tension, subtle clues and an informative title. The two Roald Dahl snapper stories I will be looking at are “The Landlady” and “Mrs. Bixby and the Colonels Coat”. Both are very clever and need to be read several times to get the full message. I will explain how he creates tension in these stories and how he develops the story to lead to a clever twist in the plot.

The first story I am going to write about is “The Landlady”. This story is about seventeen year old boy named Billy Weaver. Tired after a business trip in Bath, he looks for a place to stay. He sees a bed and breakfast and decides to stay there for the night. A middle aged woman runs the bed and breakfast. She charges him a very cheap price and gives him a floor to himself. Billy is told to sign the logbook by the landlady and does so. In the logbook he sees that only two other guests have stayed there. They both had arrived two or more years earlier. Billy finds the names familiar from the newspaper. He asks about the two guests. The landlady replies that they never left. Billy then notices that there is a dog by the fireplace and a parrot. They were both stuffed. The landlady says that she did it herself and he is impressed. She then tells him that she is a taxidermist and stuffs all her pets herself when they pass away and offers him more tea. Billy refuses because the tea tasted faintly of bitter almonds, a characteristic of cyanide.

In this story Roald Dahl uses different techniques to create tension and suspense. He starts by showing the time “The moon was coming up out of a clear starry sky.” This shows us that it is

night. This creates tension because darkness and night time is generally associated to eeriness, danger and vulnerability. He then increases this sense of vulnerability by telling the reader that Billy is young and impressionable "Billy was seventeen years old. He was wearing a new navy blue overcoat, a new brown trilby hat, and a new brown suit." He directly tells the reader that Billy is young. Billy's dress sense and the way everything is described as new suggests that he is impressionable as his clothes were fashionable at that time. He also makes Billy seem vulnerable by writing "He had never stayed in any boarding houses before, and, to be perfectly honest. He was a tiny bit frightened of them..." This shows that Billy doesn't know what to expect from a boarding house and is scared by them. This makes them look a more dark and sinister place. Dahl also creates tension by describing the sign "BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST. Each word was like a large black eye staring at him through the glass, holding him, compelling him..." This suggests that the sign has some kind of dark magical hold on him and that it is in some way evil.

Roald Dahl then goes on to create a sense of mystery by writing "There were no shops on this wide street that he was walking along, only a line of tall houses on each side, all of them identical" and "He could see that the paint was peeling from the woodwork on their doors and windows, and that the handsome white façade were cracked and blotchy." The way the hall houses are described as being identical creates a feeling of mystery. Dahl then capitalizes on this by telling us that the houses were neglected. This makes reader feel as though that not everything was quite right with this street. The way the Landlady answers the door also creates eeriness "*at once* – it must have been at once because he hadn't even had time to take his finger from the bell-button – the door swung because he hadn't even had time to take his finger from the bell-button – the door swung open and a woman was standing there." This creates a sense of eeriness; for it to be possible for the landlady to open the door so speedily, she would have had to be standing next to the door expecting it to ring. This creates the feeling that the landlady is supernatural in some way. This is then reinforced when he writes "'I saw the notice in the window,' he said, holding himself back. 'Yes, I know'" and "'It's *all* ready for you, my dear.'" The first quote implies that the Landlady already knew that Billy was coming and

was expecting him. It also tells us that Billy is slightly scared by her speedy response in answering the door by his body language and the way he holds himself away from her. The second quote adds to the idea of the landlady being in some way supernatural or psychic as she has already prepared everything for him. The way she says “all” suggests that she has prepared something more than the bed.

Throughout the story Roald Dahl plants clues to what might happen at the end. At first sight most of these clues seem to just be ordinary description or humorous comments and it is not until the end that we understand their full meaning. One example of this is “Animals were usually a good sign in a place like this.” This quote also incorporates irony. Billy thinks this to reassure and convince himself to stay at the bed and breakfast. However, Billy does not know that the animals have in fact been killed and stuffed by the landlady, as he will be later on. Billy also thinks “she was not only harmless – there was no question about that – but she was also a kind and generous soul.” This is a very ironic thought because it turns out that she was in fact a killer and in no way kind and generous. Billy realises that the woman is “slightly dotty” quite early on in the story but fails to take heed because the price of the room is so cheap. Another clue in the plot is when the landlady says “an acceptable young gentleman will come along” and “I see someone there who is just *exactly* right.’ ‘Like you’” At first read these quotes strengthen the idea that the landlady is crazy but after we have read the ending we understand that she only accepts certain gentlemen because she wants her stuffed humans to look perfect. The landlady also says “I’m so glad you appeared . . . I was beginning to get worried.” This quote shows that the landlady has something along the lines of “an inner eye” as she knew that he was coming despite the fact that no prior arrangement had been made. Another hint is when the landlady says “...we don’t want to go breaking any laws at *this* stage of the proceedings.” This makes the reader feel that the landlady must be having a private joke about what is going to take place and that something illegal is going to happen later. Billy finds the guest book very interesting as he remembers the two previous guest’s names from somewhere “...Christopher Mulholland... wasn’t *that* the name of the Eton schoolboy who was on a walking tour through the West Country, and then all of a sudden...” This is one of the most important clues in the plot as

it warns the reader about what had happened to the previous guests. Another important clue is when the landlady contradicts herself. One of the first things she says to Billy is that “We have it *all* to ourselves.” However near the very end of the story, after Billy has started to drink the drugged tea, she says “But my dear boy, he never left. He’s still here. Mr. Temple is also here.” Once Billy has drunk the drugged tea the Landlady obviously feels it is safe enough to tell him a little more, as she then tells him that Mr Temple hadn’t a “Blemish on his body.” This makes us wonder how she knew this and what had happened to him. The last clue in this story is “I stuff *all* my little pets myself.” This explains the previous odd comments from the landlady and tells us of Billy’s imminent fate. However Billy does not realise what is going to happen until after he has been drugged with the cyanide and is too weak to escape.

The second story I will look at is “Mrs. Bixby and the Colonels Coat”. This story is about Mrs. Bixby and her husband Cyril Bixby, a dentist, who lives in a flat. Unknown to Mr. Bixby, his wife has a boyfriend called the Colonel who is “Huge and bristly, and when you went near him to him he smelled faintly of horseradish” and who she sees once a month, under the pretence that she is visiting her aunt. One day, Mrs. Bixby gets a rare and expensive present from the Colonel: an expensive black mink coat. A letter from the Colonel that came in the box with the coat explains to Mrs. Bixby that they can no longer see each other, and suggests she tells her husband the mink coat was a present from her aunt for Christmas. Mrs. Bixby realises that her aunt is too poor to buy such a coat for her and that her husband would know this. She decides to go to a pawn-broker, and sells the coat for £50. The pawnbroker gives her a ticket that she refuses to fill in. However the ticket does mean that she can come back and reclaim the coat. She tells her husband that she found the ticket in the taxi, and after some debate about who should get the coat, “But it’s *my* ticket! Please let me do it Cyril!” he decides it would be best if he redeemed the ticket. The next day Mr. Bixby goes to the pawn shop and collects the “unknown” object. His wife comes into his dental practice and asks to see the object. He tells her to close her eyes and to come into his office. Just before she opens her eyes to see it, he says “It’s real mink!”. She opens her eyes to find a mink stole. Before Mrs. Bixby leaves, Mr. Bixby tells her that he will be coming home late that night. When Mrs. Bixby leaves

she intends to go to the pawn broker and get her coat. But as Mrs. Bixby leaves her husband's office, she notices that her husband's secretary is wearing a black and rare mink coat. Exactly like the one the Colonel gave to Mrs. Bixby.

In this story it is made clear that at one time Mrs. Bixby had thought her husband amazing. "His suits were too ridiculous for words. there had been a time when she thought they were wonderful." Over the years she has tired of him. It is obvious that at this moment in time Mrs. Bixby thinks very little of her husband. She thinks him "subsexual" and "small, neat and bony." She also thinks that he is "an ageing peacock". Mrs. Bixby constantly thinks how to change him: "I really must try to change the way he dressess, she told herself." In the story Mr. Bixby is made to sound very boring: "See what I've bought to measure vermouth... I can get it to the nearest milligram in this" This makes him sound very dull as he is excited by the most mundane things.

The irony in this story is provided by Mrs. Bixby. She thinks "...this was obviously meant to convey that he was a bit of a dog. But Mrs. Bixby knew better. The plumage was a bluff. It meant nothing." She thinks that no one could find her husband attractive and that he would never cheat on her. However later on in the story we find out that Mr. Bixby is doing exactly that.

In the story Dahl has used plenty of subtle clues to give the reader a hint to what might happen at the end. However by telling the story from Mrs Bixby's point of view he has drawn the readers attention away from Mr. Bixby, so many of the clues pass unnoticed. The first clue in the story is when Mr. Bixby tells his wife that on his night alone from her he "Stayed in the office and cast a few inlays." This makes him sound once again very dull and boring. However it turns out that this is just a cover up for staying with his assisstant. There is another hint during Mr. and Mrs. Bixby's phone conversation "'I'm coming down there right now!' 'I'd rather you didn't.' 'Don't be so silly, darling. Why shouldn't I come?' 'Because I'm to busy'" At first glance this just seems that Mr. Bixby is very busy. But when we find out what the snapper is we understand that he had alternate reasons for not wanting Mrs. Bixby to come down. Another clue to what might happen is when Mr. Bixby tells his wife that he will be working

late again. "It'll probably be at least eight-thirty the way things look at the moment." This is once again a cover up for seeing Miss Pulteney.

In the story Dahl uses Mrs. Bixby's excitement to create tension. "...she actually started forward in order to clasp the coat in her arms." However there is an immediate drop in tension when Mrs. Bixby discovers that all her husband has is a neckpiece.

In "Mrs. Bixby and the Colonels Coat" a red herring is used. It has obvious clues to lead the reader off in the wrong direction. The red herring is used to create tension. The first clue is when Mrs. Bixby is at the pawnbrokers. She says "But all I've got is a number. So actually you could hand me any old thing you wanted, isn't that so?" This is more obvious to the reader than any of the clues to the real ending. Because of this the reader assumes that the red herring is the real ending and reads on to find out if they are right. This red herring is then reinforced by what happens at the dental practice. "But there was no coat. There was only a ridiculous little fur neckpiece dangling from her husband's arms." This supposedly confirms the reader's assumption. Roald then reveals at the very end that the reader is actually wrong: "'Isn't it a gorgeous day?' Miss Pulteney said as she went by, flashing a smile. There was little lilt in her walk, a little whiff of perfume attending her, and she looked exactly like a queen, just exactly like a queen in the beautiful black mink coat that the Colonel had given Mrs. Bixby." This indirectly tells us of Mr. Bixby's affair and why Mrs. Bixby only had a "mangy neckpiece"

In my opinion both of these snapper stories are excellent. They have subtle hints, irony, tension and informative titles. They keep the reader guessing until the very end and both make the reader think. They have to be re-read to be fully understood and I feel that this makes the stories more revealing and enjoyable. I also think they are successful as they spring the snapper very well and it surprises you. The snappers work well because Roald Dahl does not directly tell you what happens but leaves you to imagine it for yourself.

Commentary

This response to two short stories demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- The response is detailed and thorough, showing clear engagement with, and enjoyment of, the texts.
- There are some lapses into narrative (for example the second paragraph of the response) with focus on authorial techniques a little self-conscious at times (for example 'In this story Roald Dahl uses different techniques to create tension and suspense. He starts by showing the time "The moon was coming up out of a clear starry sky." This shows us that it is night. This creates tension because darkness and night time is generally associated to eeriness, danger and vulnerability'). This is also apparent in the discussion of the red herring in the second story.
- Elsewhere, however, an astute appreciation of the writer's technique is demonstrated ('. . . by telling the story from Mrs. Bixby's point of view he has drawn the reader's attention away from Mr. Bixby, so many of the clues pass unnoticed').
- There is promising evidence of inference and close reading skills (for example the section in the fourth paragraph with the discussion of the nature of the landlady – 'The way she says "all" suggests that she has prepared something more than the bed').
- Although there is some overview evident ('However, Billy does not know that the animals have in fact been killed and stuffed by the landlady, as he will be later on') transition between the two texts is rather clumsily managed, and it could be considered how necessary it was to address the two stories in a single task.

Way forward

- Next step would be to develop a more seamless integration of discussion of stylistic features and their effect.

2. Comparison of Angelou and Hesketh poems (features of Level 7)

Compare and contrast 'Geriatric Ward' by Phoebe Hesketh and 'On Ageing' by Maya Angelou

In 'Geriatric Ward', the poet talks about the elderly suffering in silence and dying. It shows us the elderly are helpless in the hospital ward. Also, the doctors feel helpless, as is shown in verse two. It also implies that the elderly are dying slowly and painfully, and that there is no point in living the last part of their lives.

In verse one, Hesketh starts her poem with "feeding time". It creates the impression that the old people in the poem are like babies. They have no control or power over themselves, like they have to be fed and dressed. It also creates the image of chaos in a zoo as you can see animals fighting for food from one person– and causing trouble. Also in the first verse, the poet says "do they have souls?" This tells us that the first impression the poet had of the elderly were drippy, brain-dead people with no minds or character.

In the second verse, Hesketh shows a doctors dialogue. It explains to us that the doctor feels helpless to the people in his care. He feels they are only living on the blood and air that the doctors supply so he feels there is no point in them living without minds. He feels he should show the elderly "dignity in death" instead of living hell. "death wasn't meant to be kept alive". Also the doctor says that he "only learned about cells" and that he doesn't understand souls. This shows that he doesn't have an understanding of life, only how life works. The doctor also tells us that old people are "law-abiding as leaves withering under frost". This is a simile and it is effective as the word "law-abiding" tells us that, although the old people in the poem will die, a new group of old people will always appear, like new leaves coming back after the old ones have fallen.

The poet also talks about "the Mother who knows best". This emphasises that the doctors will never give up on the old people until mother nature takes them, i.e die. naturally. At the end of the second verse there are two metaphors. They are "spray cabbages with oxygen" and "pulses of breathing bags". When the poet says "spray cabbages" this tells us they are cabbages, not merely like cabbages. It is effective because cabbages get sprayed, and so do the elderly with oxygen. It shows a negative, limp picture in our

minds of people turning into cabbages. "Pulses of breathing bags" is effective because we usually refer to elderly nasty people as 'old bags'. Also Hesketh doesn't talk about anything inside the bags. The only sign of life in the old people is their pulse and their breathing.

In the third and final verse, the poet tells us that "one by one they ooze away." This is effective as it explains they die a painful death, feeling sad and weak. Hesketh ends the last line with a rhyme. "ooze away in the cold . . . detention of the old". It is effective as it is a different style to the other lines and verses, so it shows a definite ending. The poet also uses alliteration at the end of the poem, "dragged-out detention". It emphasises how long the elderly have been alive, and the time they were alive was gruelling, painful and lasted a long time like detention. This alliteration also shows a clear and definite finish.

In 'On Ageing' Angelou is writing in the first person. We hear of an elderly person who looks different on the outside, but feels the same as she did when she was young on the inside. The woman is talking to someone else. She doesn't want sympathy and she doesn't want to rest like an old person. She is very independent and has the right attitude.

In the first verse, the poet is describing how she feels about getting old. She doesn't want sympathy or pity "hold! stop! don't pity me! Hold! stop! your sympathy!" These lines are very up-beat and show the old woman is lively. We see it's up-beat because of the use of exclamation marks. Also the rhyme makes it sound like a song and it sticks in your mind for a long time. This theme and style continues through the poem. The rhyming also sets a sad mood as it makes the woman sound jokey and not serious about getting old and dying. There is a simile in the first verse, "sitting quietly like a sack left on the shelf". This means that she feels helpless and can't move, like a sack of potatoes.

In the second verse Angelou goes on to talk about how the old woman will not want to relax and finally change into an old person when her bones give up. Angelou is American, and we see this because of the words "don't bring me no rocking chair". In Britain we would say 'a' rocking chair and the use of 'no' is American slang. Also in verse three we come across the American accent, "ain't gone".

In verse three the poet explains that “tired don’t mean lazy” and that she’s the same person as she was “back then” but her features have changed. She also tells us how lucky she is that she can still “breathe in”. That last line is powerful as we see that the woman is telling people that she can breathe– that she doesn’t need help like everyone thinks she does, but it also shows she has dignity and stamina.

‘Geriatric Ward’ and ‘On Ageing’ have very different contents and have a different message but they have many similarities too. For a start, the two poems are about the pain of getting old and we are made to feel sympathy for the characters. The two poems also have similes. ‘Geriatric Ward’ also has three similarly structured verses and this also applies to ‘On Ageing’. Both poets are women and I think they put more emotion into their poems than men would.

On the other hand the two poems have many differences. ‘Geriatric Ward’ is written in direct speech and ‘On Ageing’ is written in reported speech. I think as ‘Geriatric Ward’ is written in direct speech it makes it sound more real and alive. ‘On Ageing’ has a happier mood than ‘Geriatric Ward’ as the woman is lively and has a better attitude. The woman is also independent where as in ‘Geriatric Ward’ the people need lots of help and there is no point in them living as they are immobile and in a ward. ‘On Ageing’ is set in a house. ‘Geriatric Ward’ is written by a British poet and in the third person, however ‘On Ageing’ has an American poet and is written in the first person. Many words are influenced by the two poets accent and language. There are more metaphors and similes in ‘Geriatric Ward’ than in ‘On Ageing’. I think this is because ‘Geriatric Ward’ is more serious and is more down-beat than ‘On Ageing’. ‘On Ageing’ is also more fun and rhymes more than ‘Geriatric Ward’.

In my opinion ‘On Ageing’ is the best piece as it is more enjoyable and happy than ‘Geriatric Ward’. It also shows that the old woman is enjoying her life to the full even when she is classed she shouldn’t be. I also like this poem because it rhymes and sounds like a song so the meaning and point of the poem sticks in your mind. Unlike ‘Geriatric Ward’, ‘On Ageing’ is a happier poem and I would like to think not all old people are ill, in pain and on wards!

Commentary

This response to two poems demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- These are appropriately challenging texts in terms of both content and style.
- A clear grasp of the general content and meaning of both poems is shown.
- Although there is a general grasp of the imagery used by the poets, an understanding of the full significance of the symbolism and images is not always evident (for example the exploration of “feeding time” and “breathing bags” in the first poem).
- While stylistic features are noted, this is more at the level of ‘spotting’ features (for example ‘The poet also uses alliteration at the end of the poem’). Elsewhere, however, there is some evidence of appreciation of stylistic choices, such as the focus on exclamation marks in the Angelou poem, and discussion of their effect.
- Some of the points made are rather laboured, and not central to the poems’ meanings, such as the section on Angelou’s American dialect.

Way forward

- Although there is a lively and informed personal response, the section comparing and contrasting is straightforward at best, and at times superficial (‘The two poems also have similes’) and addressing this aspect of reading would be an appropriate next step.

3. Zephaniah novel *Face* (features of Level 8)

How is Martin's character presented by Zephaniah in his novel 'Face'

In the novel 'Face' by Benjamin Zephaniah, a boy named Martin is the main character. In this essay I shall explore Martin's personality, and the ways that Zephaniah presents the changes in his character in the rites of passage novel.

The first chapter opens into Martin's classroom on the last day of school. Zephaniah shows Martin as a mischievous character, joker and class clown from the moment Martin opens his mouth. "'Sir, have you got any advice on holiday sex?'" is what he says, with his 'up to no good' look on his face. Martin is presented as a class entertainer, as the class bursts into 'uncontrollable laughter'. Martin is confident in front of his peers and bows to the class 'like an actor taking a bow at the theatre.' He apparently does this quite often, as 'everyone in the class knew' that Martin was about to cause some mischief.

Martin is the leader of the gang made up by him and his two friends, and they are clearly a troublemaking group, as Mr Lincoln, their teacher, 'insisted that Martin sat in the front row and Mark at the back.' And Zephaniah sums them up when he writes, 'you could feel them planning the defeat of order'. The gang were known to all but themselves as 'Martin Turner and his mates,' another way Zephaniah shows us who is the gang leader, and who is the popular one. The three have a 'reputation for mischief making and playing tricks', and in this way Martin calls attention to himself and shows off, making him admired by his friends and classmates, and consequently quite cocky and full of himself. Martin's school reports say 'he needed to pay more attention', highlighting that Martin is a bit of a rebel, and 'lacks discipline', meaning that even though he's 'one of the best gymnasts in school' he isn't in the team.

Looks are shown to be paramount for Martin by Zephaniah, as Martin is going out with Natalie Hepburn, who had once been in a television commercial because of her 'Mediterranean looks and her long black hair.' Zephaniah emphasises that Natalie loves Martin's 'brown eyes, his long, thick brown hair, which just rested on his shoulders, and his slim build.' Martin had a 'cute baby face', and the type of face 'many artists and impressionists would dream of'.

Martin is 'aware of this gift' and consequentially quite self-conscious, and always wanting to look good, believing that appearance was always of vital importance.

His friends and peers are shown to have encouraged this, especially Natalie and Mark. Zephaniah makes Martin seem like a role model by the way Mark is always copying him and his desperation to 'try and be like Martin'. Mark 'loved Martin's confidence and sense of trickery' and is often envious of Martin's looks and popularity. But most of Mark's pranks backfired, 'leaving him with egg (or saliva) on his face'. Zephaniah often highlights the way that Natalie, along with his peers, are constantly boosting his ego. He is treated with respect by his classmates, and he is often the centre of attention, and loves to make heads turn. Again, the quote 'known as Martin Turner and his mates' shows that Martin is the leader and the most popular and confident, and his peers perception of him is the class entertainer, assertive and attractive. The quote 'cause trouble and entertain the class' corroborates this. Matthew and Mark happily look to him as leader and recognise his status. Natalie is portrayed as a girl who is 'trying to sell an image', and the good-looking boyfriend fits in nicely. Martin is subconsciously aware that Natalie prefers his looks rather than his personality subsequently making him even more appearance-conscious.

As well as his cohorts and peers, Martin's parents encourage his materialistic attitude with things such as the 'Armani jeans that his mother had just bought him', and '£50 of sweatshirt and his £90 worth of jeans'. He spends a lot of time 'looking at himself in the full length mirror,' making sure that what he wears looks good, even when he is just 'hanging' with his mates. His parents know that Martin looks good, and, like his social group, boost his ego by buying him expensive, designer clothes that encourage his urge to look good.

Zephaniah builds up the atmosphere just before the crash, when Martin is relaxing with Mark, Matthew, and Natalie, on a 'hot, sticky Saturday night' in East London. Zephaniah even talks about the sirens that could be 'heard in the distance – and some not so distant.' Natalie is image conscious, wearing 'clothes that shone'. The journey is described in detail, and the naturalness of the evening builds up into a life-changing event. Also, Zephaniah uses this journey to emphasise Martin's prejudice about looks. He sees

everyone as a colour, a race, handsome or ugly, not as people just like him. The quotes 'those black girls', 'didn't know you had black friends', 'get away with a racist remark', 'it's all black music,' and 'I ain't got nothing against blacks, they're just different', establish this.

They go to a rap club; even though at the start Martin's racial prejudices nearly prevent it. Zephaniah shows their rebellious side as they go over into a corner with the three girls, the object of some of Martin's whispered racial comments, and have 'two large cans of beer' between them. 'Martin drank a lot' illustrates his subversive side. When they left the club, Martin was shown to be under the influence of drink, and was worse the wear for it. When Pete Mosley, whom Martin knows is involved with 'the Raider's Posse, a gang known for their outlandish activities', shows up in a 'red ford escort', Martin gets in the car, followed by Mark, who mimics Martin all the time. Matthew, the 'more cautious' one, says he thinks 'you lot are mad'. Zephaniah compares Martin, who is confident because he is admired, with Matthew, who has the confidence to stand up to his friends. This stresses that it is Martin's exterior that makes him self-assured.

Zephaniah next presents Martin's character after the crash, when he awakens. He finds out something has happened to his 'cute baby face', and 'his heart pounded'. This shows how important Martin's appearance is to him. He felt 'locked in a nightmare' and 'was frightened, but didn't want to show his fear.' But Martin wanted to know the full extent of his injuries, so he insists upon being given a mirror, and once again Zephaniah verifies Martin's obsession with his appearance by describing in great detail the 'silent shock' of Martin's face, and his feelings. Quotes such as 'Is that really me?' 'why me?' and 'maybe it will fall off and the real me will be underneath' show Martin's views on seeing his face. However, Martin shows strength of character by keeping his mirror by his bedside and looking at himself every morning when he awakens, and refuses to let anyone remove it.

Zephaniah then describes Martin's visits from his friends. When they arrived 'Martin sprang to life'. But he starts to realise what his disfigurement means when the 'atmosphere was tense', and he sensed that his friends 'were nervous'. Zephaniah accentuates this to show the start of a changing life for Martin. There had never

been an 'uncomfortable pause' in their conversation before. 'Silence fell in the room', and 'no one knew how to respond', support this statement too. Also, Martin realised that none of his friends had 'looked him in the face' while he was looking at them, but when 'his eyes were off them, he could feel them staring'. And Zephaniah builds up to the scene when Natalie and Martin are alone; the conversation 'seemed staged and artificial', and though Martin's eyes 'were fixed upon Natalie' Natalie's eyes 'shifted to the left, then onto Martin, then to the right, then back on to Martin'. And when Martin suggests Natalie kisses him, she 'had no idea how to reply'. This is starting to show that Natalie is more interested in his image than his personality, and has visual prejudices.

The next event to unfold that has significant bearing upon Martin's change in character occurs after Martin decides to 'venture out' of his room and through the burns ward. He meets 'a boy about his age... with a face so disfigured that he gasped with surprise.' Martin 'could not stop staring' at his face, but he 'admired this boy's confidence'. He finds out that he is called Anthony, and they get on very well, and find that they have similar interests, like both supporting West Ham football team. This is Zephaniah illustrating how Martin's materialistic attitude is being replaced by an ability to see the person within, and not their looks or disfigurement.

When Martin comes home, it is the first time he has been outside since the crash, and therefore a big test for him. Not once did Martin 'look out of the taxi window into the street.' Zephaniah tells us this to display that Martin is still very self-conscious, and whereas before he was happy with the way he looked; now he is not, and this decreases his self-confidence. When he gets home, he 'only gave his home a quick glance before rushing in'. This highlights that he doesn't want to linger and give passers by an opportunity to gawp, as he himself secretly knows he would. When he is at home, it is different looking at him in the mirror at home; he is in 'familiar surroundings with an unfamiliar face'.

Martin makes the decision to return to school with everyone else on the first day of the autumn term. Mr Lincoln, his school teacher, comes to visit him, and explains 'do you realise I will have had no chance to prepare the class', but Martin still insists 'that he doesn't want any special treatment' and that 'if (Martin) can't even face

(Martin's) school, (Martin) has got problems.'

On the first day back, as soon as Martin set foot outside his door, he was very busy 'watching people watching him'. Zephaniah puts in sentences such as 'no longer the leader of the gang' and 'not playing his usual tricks' to lay emphasis on how Martin has changed. In school he realises that his friends are different too. He is 'no longer leading', because the chief thing that gave him confidence, his good looks which he thought were all important have gone, and Zephaniah proves that Martin's strength of character is weakened. His attitude in the classroom is different, he doesn't want to draw attention to himself, his 'jokes are conspicuous by their absence', and he is 'not the prankster he used to be'. He is also taking a 'genuine interest' in subjects, as now he is not concentrating on mucking around his concentration is going into lessons. His friends are changing too, Zephaniah is highlighting how many people are visually prejudiced, and how many people think looks are more important than the individual inside. Martin is 'no longer the main man' both in his gang and in the classroom, he is 'no longer leading' and he suspects that in reality, Matthew and Mark are 'no longer his friends', Mark 'wanted to be with Martin at every opportunity – this wasn't so now' Mark had formed his own gang called the White Knights, and Matthew preferred his own company. Zephaniah highlights Martin's realisation that he 'had to become an educator', and show people how the outside of a person did not matter, and how it is their inner beauty that truly counts, after he has a fight with a boy who insinuates that he looks 'poxy'. Martin sees the prejudice in others, and the quote 'he needs help!' establishes this. Zephaniah creates the character of Martin as an independent one, who does not want pity. This is corroborated by when a girl gives him a card saying 'Get well soon'. Martin finds her and informs her 'I'm not bloody ill!' making it clear that he does not want pity.

Martin evaluates himself when he gets home, and he cottons on to how he is changing. He admits to himself that he would have 'had a good look' or 'cracked a joke', and he discovers that he used to make judgements on looks, and was prejudiced before the crash.

However next, Zephaniah creates a high point for Martin. 'Happiness radiated from him' when he is chosen as the gymnastics captain, and he becomes the 'chosen one' and the

'main man' again. He regains some of his lost confidence, and 'his enthusiasm' is noticeable. He is committed, and comes up with 'original' ideas for his team.

But it only takes one Sunday afternoon and a 'group of about ten children, none of the older than eleven' to 'send him to an all time low. "Ugly man"', "'Dog face'" and "'Don't let him touch you, he'll kill you!'" are some of the insults jeered at him by this group. A lady intervenes, but Martin is 'too upset and he didn't want any pity.' Zephaniah depicts Martin's feelings with quotes such as 'all time low', 'head hung low', 'worst he had felt in ages' and 'depressed and disheartened'. To put the feather on the donkey's back, Zephaniah then creates a scene showing Natalie's fickleness and her love of good looking boys. Martin's emotions when he sees her kissing another boy can be expressed in quotes such as 'he froze for a moment' and 'clenched his fist in anger.' He had been hoping that she just needed some time to come round after the shock of him losing his good looks, hoping that she liked his personality more than his appearance, but he realised that this was not so after seeing her with another boy with 'cute Mediterranean looks', 'tanned silky skin and long bouncy hair.'

When Martin reached home, he 'went to bed' and shut down completely. In the morning, "'Leave me alone, Mom. I'm not going to school,' is an example of how he gives up on life. He 'spent the day waiting for the day to go away,' 'had little breakfast' and 'stayed in bed'. His self esteem has reached an all time low, "'I don't like me'", and he wasn't even interested in his gymnastics.

Martin's sentiments took a further turn when he went to see Alan Green, his counsellor. Alan cheered him up with a truthful answer, but it was on the way out that Zephaniah has the one person who really 'amazed Martin' with his confidence appear on the scene. Anthony. '*What would those children have done if they had come across him?* Martin thought', and to his parents surprise, Martin invites Anthony to come and watch his gymnastics team compete the next Saturday. 'They laughed and slapped hands' and Martin's confidence and self-esteem returns again, bit by bit.

In the final chapters, Zephaniah brings Martin's confidence to an all time high, as he urges his team on for the competition. 'Tomorrow...we can do it!' are his confident words. He competes,

asking himself if the audience 'were looking at a gymnast or a face?' He is strong in character, even when his team are disqualified; he is almost back to his loud, confident self as he criticizes their decision. He even says, 'no problem' to having his photo taken, the idea he had sullenly refused less than a week ago.

At the very end of the book, Martin says to Anthony, "'It's not the winning that matters, or even the taking part. For me, it's the being here. Today I'm the winner.'" I think that here Zephaniah is trying to show us how Martin has overcome his facial prejudices, and has coped with his disfigurement, and all the things life has hurled at him. He has come through it all, and feels now that he is the winner, and on top of the world.

Commentary

This response demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8.

- This is evidence of high and sustained achievement on an accessible text, written for a teenage audience. The task is enabling, and the response is well focused throughout, with no lapses into narrative, nor a book review approach.
- Confident assimilation of supporting evidence is demonstrated in the succinct and apt use of integrated quotations (for example 'Martin is the leader of the gang made up by him and his two friends, and they are clearly a troublemaking group, as Mr Lincoln, their teacher, 'insisted that Martin sat in the front row and Mark at the back' ').
- The clear focus on the author's presentation of character leads to appreciation of style and effect, and there is much evidence of the learner's high level of skill throughout the task (for example ' . . . once again Zephaniah verifies Martin's obsession with his appearance by describing in great detail the 'silent shock' of Martin's face, and his feelings'). A clear awareness of authorial intention is a particular strength ('Zephaniah accentuates this to show the start of a changing life for Martin').
- A clear engagement with, and enjoyment of, the novel, is perhaps best shown in the idiomatic, 'To put the feather on the donkey's back, Zephaniah then creates a scene showing Natalie's fickleness'. The response is assured and evaluative throughout, with evidence and ideas selected and synthesised effectively.

Way forward

- A next step would be to build on this obvious enthusiasm by extending the range of texts.

4. Comparison of Larkin and Frost poems (features of Level 8)

Discuss and Compare, “Death of a Hired Hand” and “Places, Loved Ones”

The two poems I will use for comparison are, “Places, Loved Ones”, by Philip Larkin and “Death of a Hired Hand”, By Robert Frost. Both poems explore the themes of Home and Belonging, though each poem deals with the themes very differently.

The first poem I will look at is Philip Larkin’s, “Places, Loved Ones”, written in 1954. In this poem, Larkin debates the value and meaning of love and home. In the first stanza he says that he has never found a place he could call home, or a person he could love. The second stanza dwells more on Larkin’s attitude to home and love, and why they may not work out to his best interests. The third, and final stanza, is used by Larkin to discuss how it feels to grow older and not have a real home or someone to love.

Larkin opens his poem with the lines;

*“No, I have never found
The place where I could say
This is my proper ground,
Here I shall stay;”*

This opening section appears very blunt and frank, but is obviously just the way Larkin feels about his subject. The reference to “*proper ground*” may mean a place where he would feel happy to stay and grow old, or to a place to be buried when he dies. It may be that Larkin views the two as the same place and feels that if he could stay in one place until his death, then that would be the place he would want to be buried. Larkin goes on to talk about love, and how he has never found it, or the ;

*“special one
Who has an instant claim
On everything I own
Down to my name;”*

As readers we suppose that Larkin’s reference to someone ‘owning’ his name is a reference to marriage , and he is telling us that he has never met the girl he wants to marry. Throughout this first section there is a definite theme of not being at all attached,

emotionally; having no home and no woman he wants to stay with for very long. This does not seem to bother Larkin though as there is no indication that he particularly cares for this lifestyle, as his reference to someone having an *"instant claim"* over him and all he owns, implies that he would lose his freedom and maybe himself to that person.

The second stanza of Larkin's poem continues with the theme of distaste at the prospect of sharing everything he has with somebody else. He writes;

*"To find such seems to prove
You want no choice in where
To build, or whom to love;"*

These lines make it sound as though Larkin is resentful towards people who have found someone they love and somewhere to stay, because they have taken the easy way out. Once settled with a home and a wife, he says that it is as though you have chosen to do as someone else bids you to rather than making your own decision as to where you will live out the rest of your days or whom you shall share those days with.

Lines 12-16 deal with the responsibilities Larkin feels love involves;

*"You ask them to bear
You off irrevocably,
So that it's not your fault
Should the town turn dreary
The girl a dolt."*

Here Larkin blames the men who move on from girls and places where they have lived for whatever caused them to move away. He says the men ask too much of the women they meet and stay with, then blame them when they grow tired of the girl and the place, so that they never have to take responsibility for their actions and mistakes.

There is a twist to the third stanza, where Larkin seems to change his mind, saying;

*"Yet, having missed them, you're
Bound, none the less, to act
As if what you settled for
Mashed you, in fact."*

This section could be interpreted in different ways. Larkin could mean, that by being, "*mashed*", he was somehow cheated of a life he should have had, or he has been affected mentally by the choices he made in his earlier life and they spoiled him. If this is what Larkin means then it is more likely that his incapability to commit has made him this way. Another way of interpreting Larkin's words is that after he has 'missed the boat' and the chance of settling down and meeting someone, he has had to act as though it was always his intention to live alone, and that he never wanted family or companionship, or ties to one place.

The second half of this last stanza offers advice to the reader;

*"And wiser to keep away
From thinking you still might trace
Uncalled-for to this day
Your person, your place."*

I take these lines to mean that, when a person is in Larkin's situation – having no real home and no family – it is better not to dwell on the past or what might have been, or to think you still may find that person, but rather to accept that you will remain alone for the rest of your life, a highly negative thought on which to end a poem.

Larkin's style, in this poem, uses very bare, plain language, with few adjectives. The descriptions he does give are very cold and negative in the context he uses them; special, instant, irrevocably and dreary being a few examples. This does not mean however that Larkin's words are easier to interpret, in fact on one level, this use of language makes it harder as the ideas are put so precisely it is harder for the reader to convey in their own terms. Some of the phrases are less obvious though and demand different interpretations. An instance of this would be when Larkin calls his situation, "*mashed*". This could mean that he was suited to them, or that they affected him negatively somehow. The pattern of the piece feels very repetitive and monotonous and the rhyming pattern can make the poem seem a lot longer than it actually is. However it is this tone and rhythm that makes the poem seem more reflective and thoughtful, the piece can also feel quite conversational in parts. The negativity towards the end of the poem holds a definite note of regret for what he might have had, as demonstrated by the phrase, "*Uncalled-for to this day*".

The poem I am comparing Larkin's with is, "Death of a Hired Hand" by Robert Frost, written in 1914. This poem is structured entirely differently to Larkin's as it is much more descriptive and is more of a narrative than Larkin's, which is more pondering and focused on his opinions.

Frost's poem tells us the story of an American farmer and his wife, and an old farm hand who used to work for the couple, but consistently let them down by going to work on other farms during the hay season, returning to the couple in the winter when they did not need his help. The farm hand, Silas, has returned to the couple to come 'home' to die, and at the end of the poem, he does pass away.

Right from the beginning of the poem, Frost begins to develop atmosphere, characters and relationships. The first line;

*"Mary sat musing the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren..."*

This conjures an image in our – the readers' – minds, the little wife waiting in the dark, for her husband to come home. Frost describes her movements to greet Warren as;

"She ran on tiptoe down the darkened passage."

The way in which Mary's movements are described, on tiptoe, reminds me of a little mouse, so implies Mary is very soft and gentle. Mary tells Warren of Silas' return and sits down with him on the porch. The interaction between Mary and Warren is very close and tender, reflecting the relationship they share. This relationship totally contrasts with the ones Larkin discusses, which consist of one person shouldering all the blame for the other person's faults and flaws and taking a claim over all the other owns. Warren and Mary are apparently quite poor, but seem happy to share what they have between them, it is not that one owns everything and the other has nothing at all. Throughout Frost's poem, the movement and exchanges of words between Mary and Warren are very soft and although they do not see eye to eye on Silas, each listens to what the other says and respects their opinion before speaking themselves.

From the events of the poem we get the impression that Warren is putting on a lot of bravado over having Silas back. This is shown in line 11, when Mary has asked Warren to; "Be kind,".

Warren's response seems to be that he is hurt by what Mary has implied;

"When was I ever anything but kind to him?"

He asks, but does add,

" 'But I'll not have the fellow back.' "

The two lines tell us that though Warren has been good to Silas in the past, he has now had enough of being let down. Later though we see Warren soften when he says;

" 'I can't think Si ever hurt anyone' "

The use of the pet name, Si, and the faith Warren proves to have in Silas shows that he does actually care for him.

Mary is very calm, kind and forgiving towards Silas. She finds him;

*" 'Huddled against the barn door fast asleep,
A miserable sight and frightening too-' "*

At this point in the poem we realise that Silas is ill. Warren has already said he is old and past working, and now Mary says he will not eat, drink, talk or smoke, even though he had previously wanted pay

" to buy tobacco with "

We also know that Silas has travelled a lot, and in this way Frost's poem is similar to Larkin's, as Silas is a loner and so is Larkin's character, they both roam around with nobody else and no real home.

Silas does find something of a home with Warren and Mary though, and Mary insists it is his home. She and Warren both have their own definitions of home, though they seem to agree.

Warren says;

*" 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.' "*

Mary adds to this,

*" 'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.' "*

Both these definitions imply that a home is something everyone is owed and doesn't, or shouldn't have to earn. Larkin however talks about home as if it is something to be found and that you have to look for it first, but until recently, he has never really wanted.

Although Mary freely admits;

*" 'Of course he's nothing to us, anymore
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us... ' "*

Warren and Mary seem to be closer to Silas than his brother who lives;

*" 'Thirteen little miles
As the road winds... ' "*

from Warren and Mary. They both know that Silas and his brother are estranged and no longer talk though they don't know why. They have heard though that his brother is a bank director and this could affect the relationship in several ways. Firstly, Silas holds little regard for education, and talks in his sleep about a boy whom he worked with on Warren and Mary's farm one summer, who went to college, but Silas thought could do better as a farm hand. Becoming a bank director would certainly require an education and this could have created a void between the brothers. Also, having been on the road most of his life, Silas probably appears very dishevelled and un-kempt, so arriving at the home of his wealthy brother could be very humiliating for Silas. He knows however that Warren and Mary will accept him as he is. Larkin's view on being accepted is more that by loving someone, not only do we accept them, but everything they have too, which is where the idea of them having a claim over us comes in.

The way Frost writes is typically American. It is very intimate and warm, for example,

*"Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills."*

This scene is very American and the manner in which it is written recurs throughout the text.

Larkin writes in a very cold, stiff manner and an example of this style is;

*“So that it’s not your fault
Should the town turn dreary
The girl is a dolt.”*

The writing styles and the approach to the subjects could be to do with the poets’ nationalities and the stereotypes we hold with them, or it could just be the way these two particular writers deal with their topics.

Another similarity is the discussional element the poems share. Larkin uses his poem to discuss his views on home and relationships, and Frost’s poem is almost entirely made up of a conversation between a husband and a wife.

Frost’s poem is far more theatrical than Larkin’s. The language is very flowery and descriptive, using plenty of adjectives and passages describing every detail, for example Silas’ sleep talking is described over 12 lines, in great detail, including background information on the boy Silas talks about. Almost the entire poem is used to show the couple debate what to do about Silas, and by the time Warren goes in to see him, Silas has passed on. This is another similarity to Larkin’s poem as it ends on a sad note. However unlike Larkin’s poem, Frost’s has no rhyming scheme or regular rhythm, it is more like a section of prose than a poem.

In conclusion, the two poems are similar in that they both explore home, belonging, relationships and loneliness, but differ in how they deal with the subjects. Larkin and Frost both offer definitions of home, but do not agree, as Frost feels it is something one is owed and Larkin has never really wanted one until now when he thinks he is too late. Larkin shows a great deal of cynicism towards relationships, whereas Frost creates a very warm, tender bond between Mary and Warren, showing optimism. Both Silas and Larkin demonstrate loneliness in older characters and the possibility that they could have had a home and company, but missed their chance. They both wander through life looking for something, in Silas’ case work and in Larkin’s, a home and a family, though maybe that is what Silas aims for too.

Commentary

This response to two poems demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8.

- These are challenging texts at this level, and throughout are addressed with confidence, revealing not only sound understanding but also an increasingly mature and sensitive engagement (see, for example, the concluding sentence: 'Larkin's view on being accepted is more that by loving someone, not only do we accept them, but everything they have too, which is where the idea of them having a claim over us comes in').
- The opening of the task, with its succinct overview of the Larkin poem, is early evidence of someone operating at a high level.
- A clear appreciation of tone is demonstrated ('This opening section appears very blunt and frank, but is obviously just the way Larkin feels about his subject') and close analysis of detail is both engaged and developed ('The way in which Mary's movements are described, on tiptoe, reminds me of a little mouse, so implies Mary is very soft and gentle').
- Discussion of both texts is extended and thoughtful (for example 'These lines make it sound as though Larkin is resentful towards people who have found someone they love and somewhere to stay, because they have taken the easy way out').
- The active seeking of alternative interpretations is further evidence of confident handling of the text ('This section could be interpreted in different ways. Larkin could mean, that by being, "mashed", he was somehow cheated of a life he should have had, or he has been affected mentally by the choices he made in his earlier life and they spoiled him').
- The transition between texts is well handled, with a clear focus on differences between the poems, and comparison across the texts is confident ('. . . in this way Frost's poem is similar to Larkin's, as Silas is a loner and so is Larkin's character, they both roam around with nobody else and no real home').

Way forward

- Although stylistic features are clearly addressed, this is the area which shows most scope for future development. Points are not always developed fully ('This scene is very American and the manner in which it is written recurs throughout the text' – what exactly is meant by this is not made clear). Discrete focus on the language of both poems is similarly stilted and underdeveloped ('Frost's poem is far more theatrical than Larkin's. The language is very flowery and descriptive, using plenty of adjectives . . .'). An appropriate next step would therefore be developing the skill of integrating analysis of stylistic features into the overview of the texts.

5. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (features of Exceptional Performance)

Show how Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies* demonstrates -- 'The end of innocence and the darkness of man's heart'.

Lord of the Flies is the hugely popular novel written in 1954 by William Golding. It has remained a famous and well-respected novel, having been made into two films and adapted for the stage in 1999 by the Royal Shakespeare Company. It follows a group of English schoolboys who crash land on a deserted island and slowly descend into savagery and anarchy. The book shows Golding's views on the themes of human nature, the importance of society and order, and the evil inside the hearts of the human race.

The focus of the story is on the steady degeneration of the boys from a state of order and peace to madness and chaos. At the beginning, they are happy and innocent, awed with the prospect of a paradise without any grown-ups to tell them off and dictate what to do. They gather to the first thing that reminds them of the civilisation before – the call of the conch, representative of the 'man with a megaphone' mentioned in the first chapter. Jack, deprived of leadership, declares the choir hunters.

The state of innocence is lost when the fun of hunting starts to go beyond a job. They neglect other duties and revere the hunt, constantly claiming that they need meat. A good example of this is when the ship passes by: "'You let the fire out.' Jack checked, vaguely irritated by this irrelevance but too happy to let it bother him. 'We can light the fire again. You should have been with us, Ralph!'" This shows that Jack is entirely engrossed with hunting and doesn't want to be rescued.

Jack soon realises the authority and power that this could give him. Other children realise the fun that hunting can be and begin to hunt with Jack instead of other duties. Ralph's ordered lifestyle becomes boring and pointless. So when Jack begins another type of civilisation, one that offers fun and hunting, they jump at it. But the biggest thing Jack offers is protection from the 'Beast', which Golding insinuates is just the evil in them all. So in their fear of it, they enter into a sort of worship of their own evil – the sacrifice of the pig's head. "This head is for the beast. It's a gift."

This tribal society begins fairly ordered – under one leader, they are all assigned jobs and promised meat. But although a pocket of civilisation survives – Ralph, Piggy and Simon – it is weakened with the horror of Simon’s murder and when they and the savages confront each other, there is a battle and with Piggy’s death, they become true savages – violent and mad. But when they meet the sailor, the true civilisation they wanted all the time, they realise what they have done. Ralph weeps because of the truth he learnt about what every person has – ‘the darkness of man’s heart’.

Jack’s savagery comes more easily than the others because the circumstances grant him leadership and power from the very beginning. At the start, Jack is the leader of the choir, who – albeit wearily – obey his commands. He attempts to obtain the chieftanship, feeling that he is the best boy for the job, but when he is cheated of that he turns to the people he does command – the choir – making them hunters. This is the crucial choice that affects Jack through the whole book, as his advantages – his age, his authority and his knife – can be used to their full potential. An example of this is when they find the piglet. “All three boys rushed forward and Jack drew his knife again with a flourish. He raised his arm in the air.” From the beginning Jack wields power and authority.

Jack’s choice to hunt soon becomes an obsession – hunting lets him exercise his power over the animals of the forest, and he often goes into a sort of savage trance, shown by the “opaque, mad look” he has while he is talking to Ralph. His hunting sets him apart from the other boys – he and Ralph are “baffled in love and hate” as their two views of what is important collide.

Eventually Jack tires of obeying Ralph and breaks away from the other boys, away to a life that is filled with hunting and meat. As the founder of the tribe, he now has his long-awaited leadership and sits there ‘like an idol’. As the other boys join the tribe, he feels the power swing and gains the confidence to destroy Piggy and the conch, leaving only Ralph left to eradicate. But at the end, when they meet the sailor, Jack realises that Ralph has been the only one worthy of leadership, shown by the way he “started forward, then changed his mind and stood still”.

Jack gains power and draws the other boys towards him for many reasons. From the beginning, his command of the choir marks him out instantly as a leadership figure – he is described as “the most obvious leader” as they choose a chief. He has the strength and authority that boys of that age can respect. Later, when the beast is introduced, they fear for their own safety and flock to Jack in fear of the unknown beast. He symbolises for them safety, protection and a strong, dependable leader to rally behind, even though he is actually the giver of evil.

Jack also has the ability to hunt, and utilise the boys killer instincts to full potential. The fun of hunting is far more exciting than the “toy of the conch”. He shows that savage instincts really can emerge under conditions where they are not prohibited, and the boys’ hunting becomes almost a worship of the evil inside them – they have ritual dances and the sacrifice of the pig for its head is tribal and their chant “Kill the pig! Slit his throat! Bash him in!” shows their degradation into the indistinguishable savages.

The most important reason for the ordered community turning into an anarchic mob is the loss of the reminders of civilisation. The assembly, once a symbol of a polite, democratic discussion, is crippled by the loss of two things – the rules and the power of the conch. They went together – the rule that you could only speak when holding the conch created fairness and equality. But they disappear when Jack says, “B**** to the rules! We’re strong, we hunt!” and breaks up the assembly. Jack also eradicates the conch’s power – “We don’t need the conch! We know who should speak! It’s time some people knew when to shut up.” The democracy is gone, paving the way for Jack’s anarchic rule.

But the conch still retains some power. It is the ultimate show of leadership and a symbol of common sense, as is Piggy, the only one who has the ability to think for himself and make informed decisions. So when Jack starts his own tribe, the conch and Piggy remain the only remnants of society, “the one thing he hasn’t got”. It has an awe effect on the savages, as shown when Piggy speaks: ‘The boeing rose and died again as Piggy lifted the white, magic shell.’ Faced with this the savages react with violence, and with the loss of the conch, Jack is the true chief, lord of his followers.

Another thing that is lost throughout the story is identity. Throughout the book, the boys following Jack gradually become known merely as 'savages', shedding their names and past lives. Jack also becomes 'The Chief' and Ralph refers to him as this for the remainder of the book. This represents them becoming one, feral organism. But the most vivid example is of Percival Wemys Madison, the small child who, near the beginning can remember every one of his contact details as a sort of mantra, but by the end, he cannot remember his name. "Percival Wemys Madison sought in his head for an incantation that had faded clean away."

The whole book is the manifestation of Golding's views on the nature of man. He expresses his opinion by writing about several points, and showing his feelings for each. I will list some of these points. One of the first is his opinion that even in the modern, civilised world, the animal instincts of man is barely suppressed, just waiting to come out. An example of this is near the beginning, the piglet incident. Mere hours after an assembly and an election, Jack gets a chance to kill, and have meat, and only stops because of the "enormity of the final blow". He instantly changed from polite schoolboy to savage hunter, with the slightest chance of a kill.

He believes that if the restraints and rules of civilisation are removed, then savagery can prosper and become the way of life. An example of this is when Roger throws stones at Henry, but misses on purpose. "Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilisation that knew nothing of him and was in ruins." But later, when the society is almost gone and savagery the norm, he has no qualms about throwing at Ralph's head. "Someone was throwing stones; Roger was dropping them."

He shows that he thinks that individuality is gradually lost – the boys eventually become the same. This is shown when Piggy dies – "Piggy" is lying dead while the "savages" cheered on. Only Piggy, Ralph and Simon stay their former selves. Ralph too feels that the mindless life of an uncaring savage is eerily inviting. "Sometimes I don't, either. What would happen if I became like them, not caring!" says Ralph – he fears that the attraction of becoming one with the others may be too strong.

One of Golding's views is that 'mob rule' can make all the

difference to a society, as shown by the choir at the beginning – they have a “uniformed superiority”. As the numbers of hunters increase compared to those on the side of order, they can commit terrible atrocities: the murders of Piggy and Simon, and the hunting of Ralph, without feeling remorse or misgivings – they feel strong and are carried along in their euphoria.

Under these conditions, Golding believes that violence and madness would become the normal way of life. This can be shown by the events such as the beating of Wilfred. ““He’s going to beat Wilfred.” “What for?” “I don’t know, he didn’t say.”” This shows that the savages would see un-needed violence going on and not care because it seems natural – Jack can wield his “irresponsible authority” as he sees fit, on anyone.

Finally he feels that the ability to think and make decisions is lost, only leaving Piggy with this ability in the end. Ralph and Samneric are confused and afraid of the tribe, and only Piggy eventually decides to face up to the tribe. Jack is afraid, because this power challenges his idea of life. Piggy also is the one who decides to finally express his views to Jack without resorting to violence. ““Let me speak””. He was standing in the dust of the fight, and the crowd saw his intention.’

Golding’s fable is, as I already mentioned, a way of expressing his opinion of human nature. He deliberately names his characters after those from *Coral Island* so that the books would be compared. He believed that Ballantyne’s views on humanity – that they were good, and that they could triumph over any evil – were wrong, that humanity would destroy itself in its own darkness. I believe that Golding was trying to say that without society, or the illusion of it, the human nature was dark and evil and savage. The quote “the end of innocence and the darkness of man’s heart” is a way of comparing life with Eden – when the greed of man caused the creation of sin and the destruction of paradise.

Commentary

This response demonstrates features characteristic of Exceptional Performance.

- There is a freshness evident in this response to a text which doubtless can be found in many English departments, and the challenging task has elicited an extremely high level of response, far beyond the normal expectations for Key Stage 3.
- Clear appreciation and understanding of authorial intention is evident throughout, and the succinctness of the response (handwritten, it occupied just short of four sides) reflects the clarity of thought – not a word is wasted.
- The writer shows a real confidence in moving around the text, synthesising and developing complex ideas, aptly supported by close analysis of language (for example ‘Throughout the book, the boys following Jack gradually become known merely as ‘savages’, shedding their names and past lives’).
- The clear appreciation of the novel’s symbolism, as in the discussion of the conch (‘representative of the ‘man with a megaphone’ mentioned in the first chapter’) and the consistent evaluation of characters and relationships (for example ‘Jack’s choice to hunt soon becomes an obsession – hunting lets him exercise his power over the animals of the forest, and he often goes into a sort of savage trance, shown by the “opaque, mad look” he has when he is talking to Ralph’) are further evidence of someone operating at the highest of levels.
- Evidence of an understanding of the subtle nuances of the novel is a feature of this response (for example the reference to the choir, ‘who – albeit wearily – obey [Jack’s] commands’), and quotations are particularly deftly handled.
- The confidence of the overview (‘The whole book is the manifestation of Golding’s views on the nature of man’) combined with a strong personal response, as well as the assured way in which reference is made to the novel’s connections with Ballantyne’s *Coral Island* and the way in which it meets the features of a fable, are further evidence of the very high quality of this response.



2

Reading – response to non-literary texts

6. Chief Seattle and Martin Luther King texts (features of Level 7)

Chief Seattle and Martin Luther King both fought for human rights. Compare and contrast their famous texts on the subject.

I have been reading two well known texts recently the first was that of Native American, Chief Seattle and his famous reply to European settlers when they proposed to buy his lands. The second was that of Martin Luther King Jr. and his world- renowned 'I have a dream speech', during the coloured uprising for equality. The first was written in 1855 and the other delivered in 1963. Both were given in very different circumstances, yet both had a very powerful message at their core.

Both call for very different things, yet they use very similar and powerful techniques to express their opinions and persuade others of their views. The 'I have a dream' speech was delivered in Washington D.C as part of Martin Luther King Jr's campaign for equality between the white and black peoples of the United States of America. It calls for an end to the injustice and oppression of the black people. For slaveowners and slaves to be brothers and sisters once more. For freedom and fairness for all, no matter what their skin colour.

Whereas the other by Chief Seattle merely accepts the proposed terms of the European settlers who are attempting to buy his land, but states many conditions which the settlers must follow if he is to accept.

There are many similarities between the two texts. Use of repetition is a favourite of the two. 'I have a dream' is used at the start of nearly every paragraph in Martin Luther King's speech to amazingly powerful effect and explains its publicly infamous title. In Chief Seattle's letter 'we' and other personal pronouns are used throughout to express that he speaks for his people as well as himself. Listing is used consistently through both texts. Martin Luther King Jr. lists the characteristics of his dream. 'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... I have a dream that one day my four little children will not be judged by the colour of their skin... I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi , a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression will be

transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice..' This listing strongly suggests that he believes that his dream should and hopefully will come true. Chief Seattle on the other hand uses listing to state the things in his homeland that he will miss: 'Every shining, pure needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect.' But also has a sub-meaning or becomes a bi-product of the list; it states clearly that he expects and demands the settlers to respect and cause no harm to the things that populate the list.

But, as there are similarities there must also be differences. Martin Luther King Jr.'s piece is a speech; Chief Seattle's was a letter. The first was emotional, whereas the letter was formal. The first inspired and incited agreement, the other merely accepted terms but set down conditions for the acceptance. The first called for change of the circumstances, the second simply surrenders to the opposition. One is a demand, the other a warning. These differences are but a few, but they are the main characteristics that make each one unique to the other.

So I draw to my conclusion. Despite the strong persuasive writing, I have chosen one that is more effective than the other. In my opinion the 'I have a dream' speech was by far and large, the best. Its deep emotion captivated me and other readers and listeners. It touched my soul and persuaded me, if possible further to the strong beliefs for equality, and human rights for all. Its main strength was its emotiveness. It inspired me greatly: sentences such as : 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character' made me ever grateful to fairness to coloured people. I am inspired and I owe it to Martin Luther King's speech about a dream which thank heaven has come true, thanks to his confidence, courage and stern determination this dream is now a reality.

Commentary

This response to two famous texts was considered to demonstrate features characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- An understanding of the ways in which the writers convey meaning is demonstrated.
- Awareness of structural and linguistic features (for example repetition, listing, use of personal pronouns) is shown.
- The writer sustains the response in an accomplished way.
- The writer moves easily between two challenging texts.

Way forward

- Personal, rather than taught, responses could be extended throughout the piece rather than reserved for the conclusion.
- More focus on the task – the effectiveness of the material rather than a preference.
- Include overview of writers' intentions.

7. Warwick Castle leaflet (features of Level 7)

How does the leaflet try to persuade the reader to visit Warwick Castle?

To begin with, the front cover of the leaflet states that Warwick Castle is 'Britain's Greatest Medieval Experience', this tells us immediately that the castle is the best in Britain and you can't find anywhere better. The picture is of a knight on horseback in full armour charging at you. This picture is very exciting and the red and silver of the knight stand out against the black background which draws the eye very effectively. The way the knight is charging at you is almost challenging you to come. The words 'Warwick Castle' are written in an elaborate font which draws the eye directly after the picture.

Inside the leaflet, the attractions and events are spread out across the page suggesting there is a very large/ endless amount of things to do so a visitor will never be bored. It uses a second person, direct appeal to the reader- 'you don't just visit... you live it' makes the reader feel directly involved and the invitation to come is personal. There are commands like 'scale the towers' and 'find out for yourself', this is forceful and makes us feel like we must do everything the castle has to offer. The rhetorical question 'How would you feel if you were preparing for what might be your last day on earth?' makes you ask yourself that question and makes you want to find out for yourself. There are challenges or dares like 'not for the faint hearted' dares the reader to come if they are tough enough, it also appeals to people who love being frightened. The phrase 'Spanning 800 years, our arms and armour collection...' This tells the reader that the castle has a huge and authentic collection of weapons and appeals to people who find that subject interesting. It also points out how old the exhibits are – more proof of authenticity.

'The torture chamber will tell you all you need to know about Medieval torture- if you really want to know!' is also an example of a dramatic explanation which is more exciting. This also appeals to thrill –seekers. If torture and battles are not your thing, the castle offers a variety of other attractions, such as Grounds and Gardens, the great hall and stately rooms or the mill and engine house. These attractions are different to the gore and

weapons and so reinforce the idea of the castle having something for everyone. The leaflet offers the panoramic view of the castle which is very impressive and makes you want to visit. It also offers a view of the great hall which is also impressive and makes you think – wow! ‘lavishly decorated rooms’ reinforce the idea of grandness.

As well as appealing to sight, the leaflet also appeals to other senses- ‘hear the washing ladies sing’ and ‘feel the weight of a sword’ makes you feel as though you can interact with the exhibits, making your day out even more fun, and it also makes us imagine what it must have been like at the actual time. Another attraction is that there is a ghost, which immediately attracts certain people and it goes on to say ‘His grisly death is now recreated in terrifyingly realistic detail’ and again, challenges the reader to come. The picture used of the ghost is in black and white and the expression on his face immediately scares, and attracts the attention of the reader. ‘Tales of treachery and torture’ and ‘dark, dingy dungeons’ both draw attention to important words and makes them more noticeable.

Apart from the major attractions, there are other small things that persuade people to come, such as ‘take advantage of the delicious freshly made meals and drinks available’: this makes you think that the castle is well catered for and impresses you. Also, the fact that the castle is open every day except Christmas day makes the castle seem accessible at all times and you have plenty of time to see everything.

All in all, this is a brilliant persuasive leaflet with a huge amount of effective persuasive features and almost certainly makes you want to visit Warwick castle.

Commentary

The analysis of persuasive techniques employed in the leaflet advertising Warwick Castle demonstrates sufficient features to confirm it as characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- There is evidence of a confident understanding of the details and overview of the leaflet.
- An awareness of the persuasive language is demonstrated in some detail, for example ' 'find out for yourself' ', ' 'feel the weight of a sword' '.
- The writer's response is thorough and sensible, as well as enthusiastic and engaged.
- An attempt to focus on language use and not be deflected by colour/layout is apparent.

Way forward

- More precision, rather than generalisation.
- Greater acknowledgement of the writer's purpose, for example in the opening paragraph.
- A more individual response.

8. 'The Most Dangerous Road in the World' (features of Level 8)

How does the writer try to make the article 'The Most Dangerous Road in the World' interesting and exciting for the reader?

It is impossible not to be interested in the Yungas Road by the time you've read a few lines of this article. It is easy enough at first, according to the description of the road 'rising gently' and winding 'through rolling pastures of grass'. However, soon after, the reader is in a totally contrasting environment when 'A gigantic vertical crack appears' and you imagine the 'sheer rock wall' and you are told the road is 'barely three metres wide', having already been told you are half a mile up! Then it gets worse. Even though we think it is already quite frightening, you are now about to go on a roller-coaster for real. Immediately after you have been told that the measly cement barriers have disappeared, you then learn of the "hairpin bends over dizzying precipices". It seems that locals, truckers and insane tourists all use the road and vehicles regularly plunge off the road throwing driver and passengers to certain death. It's probably a breathtaking scene, but it is dominated by danger rather than beauty. The authorities have been building a new road for 20 years and there are no signs of it being completed.

The behaviour of the people who travel on the road must be crazy and irresponsible. The truck drivers may have to travel on the road to get their goods from A to B, but it seems as if they trust to prayers and luck, rather than judgement. The only judgement seems to be NOT to wear a seatbelt, so you can jump out if your vehicle goes over the edge. Tourists must go for the thrill, which is irresponsible in itself. The writer's first-hand experience includes a lunatic ('impatient motorist') who overtook on the ravine side of the road. The locals are superstitious or religious, whichever you prefer. There is a lot of praying, of one sort or another. The writer must be a tourist, and he is generally behaving as if he likes the thrill of being a daredevil, but he doesn't expect to die.

The writer's use of language is interesting, because this could just be an informative piece of writing, but it is also in fact an entertaining read, because of the relaxed, casual, informal voice that the writer uses. There are several colloquial phrases – for example, the first words 'Let's face it'; 'Case in point?'; 'Believe

me, it can.’ Obviously there are lots of dramatic words, phrases and sentences – ‘nose-dives’, ‘ear-popping oblivion’, and ‘Today it (Unduavi) still represents the barrier between comfort and terror’, being just a sample. The writer really does take you on the journey, a roller-coaster ride, and you feel you are an eye-witness looking at life as you pass by (the truckers huddling, the roadside dogs) and an eaves-dropper, hearing the driver say ‘You will die’ to an overtaking motorist.

The layout is part of the same effect, because the short paragraphs, which are down to one line in one case (‘It is not a rash prediction to make’) make these ominous understatements more powerful than if they were lost in long dense stretches of prose. The pictures add a little proof of what has been described but hardly do justice to the writing (apart from being dotted appropriately through the article), but the statistics are powerful – big annual numbers of deaths and vehicles plunging into the ravines. Just in case you haven’t got it: ‘That is one every two weeks.’

Even though I wouldn’t go on the Yungas Road if you offered me a million pounds, I found the article really amazing and amusing, even if that tells you something about my black sense of humour.

Commentary

The analysis of the article shows features characteristic of performance at Level 8.

- The writer’s response is closely tied to the text, demonstrating focused analysis with apt use of quotation.
- An understanding of how the presentational devices work is shown.
- The piece presents a thoughtful, attractive voice; see the end of the penultimate paragraph.
- An ability to evaluate the text’s success is demonstrated.

Way forward

- For the learner to respond to a range of increasingly complex texts, particularly those which work on several levels.

9. Comparison of articles on dog ownership (features of Level 8)

Both texts, 'Get your dog on a lead' and 'Irresponsible dog owners give others a bad name', discuss the problems of dogs in the community. Which text do you think does this more effectively, and why?

'Get your Dog on a Lead' is an article written by a non-dog lover against dogs and dog owners, because of the nuisance factor that they cause in the community. The other text, a column from a community newsletter, admits that some dog owners are irresponsible, but defends and even praises most dog owners for their responsible attitude.

'Get Your Dog on a Lead' preaches to the converted. If you don't like dogs, you'll agree with everything in the article, but you are unlikely to be impressed if you are a dog owner, responsible or not. However, given that the writer wants to let off steam, with a very powerful outburst, the article does achieve its objective. It's a wake-up call for everyone about how disgusting and annoying dogs are, if they are not properly handled. The writer tells it how it is – there is no attempt to be polite or subtle. He's a victim and he is having a justifiable moan. The Alsatian in the picture concentrates your mind as you read about the barking, jumping and sniffing that dogs do to people, even when they are not being aggressive. Fouling in public is a step above though, and it is not acceptable for owners not to clean up after their pet. The writer tells his story of the kite in graphic detail, making you realise that no one could defend that. His sarcasm when he says 'How nice,..' is almost unnecessary. It is just so typical when the owner makes a half-hearted apology, and you can't blame the writer for his wish to send the dog into orbit, on the end of his boot presumably, tied up to the kite.

I like the way this person is definitely not a dog-person, referring to 'one of those little terrier things' clearly because he hasn't got a clue about names of breeds. You can tell when he says 'little blighter' and 'cheeky mongrel' as euphemisms that he would actually use stronger language if he could.

By the end of the article – even if the story is exaggerated or completely made-up – I was very much on the side of the writer, who was hounded (no pun intended!) even onto his own property by our four-legged friends. Perhaps he doesn't win any prizes for reasonable argument, but what he describes does happen all too often. In truth, dog owners and non-dog owners should both be appalled by what has happened. A lot of owners would be in denial about this topic, but some would admit that there is a lot of truth in it, and that they themselves are not squeaky clean in the way they behave. I think it is a very effective text, because everybody will have a strong reaction to it.

The other text, 'Irresponsible Dog Owners Give Others A Bad Name', is on the same subject, but is completely different in every other way. It is from a community newsletter and so it is directed at a wide cross-section of the public. It is trying to get a similar result, to be fair, namely to get dog owners to do what is right, but it is actually praising most dog owners and also praising the council at the end for providing just two(!) new Poop Scoop dispensers, which might not even be used anyway. It lists all the things that responsible dog owners do (which might prick the conscience of one or two) and it tells off those who let the others down by giving everyone a bad name. It states strongly that it's against the law to let your dog make a mess and makes it clear that it is 'anti-social'. I can't believe though that other dog owners are 'collecting the by-products and eventually depositing them in the yard of the perpetrator'. Not even the writer of the article would go that far!

I found this piece very irritating, because it reminds me of these people who pamper their dogs more so than just responsible dog-owners. The cute references to Rover and doggie dung make you think of rich, old American women who leave their millions to their pets. It probably admits as much in the first paragraph – 'They probably treat their dogs better than many governments treat their people'. I suppose it is well-intended, but because it is trying to be 'nice' and balanced, you feel it is going to be less effective than 'Get Your Dog On A Lead'.

Commentary

This response to two articles demonstrates sufficient features to characterise performance at Level 8.

- The writer provides a confident overview of the texts.
- The style of the writer's response is in tune with original authors' intentions.
- Evidence of sophisticated evaluation of key linguistic use is demonstrated, for example the euphemisms in paragraph 3.
- There is an appreciation of the humour implicit in the first author's bias.
- The writer identifies features within challenging texts.

Way forward

- A better balance could be achieved in the responses to each text.
- More explicit consideration of audience and purpose across texts.
- Consideration of alternative interpretations.
- Provision of a clear conclusion as required by the task.

10. Drug taking in sport (features of Exceptional Performance)

The newspaper article by Daniel Benjamin titled 'The Shame of the Games' and an essay, written by athlete Matt Yates, both express their writers' views on drug taking by athletes. Compare and contrast how the writers treat the issue of drugs in sport in these texts.

The texts I am looking at for this piece both study the use of drugs in athletics and the writers' own opinions of the matter. While they share this fundamental link, they differ in their handling of the subject.

The key and most obvious difference between the two texts is the viewpoint of each writer. It is key because it affects the language, tone, and even the purpose of each text. Matthew Yates' piece on Olga Yegorova is very biased in its delivery of the subject and thus has a much darker tone, whereas Daniel Benjamin's take on Ben Johnson in the 1988 Olympics is neutral for the most part.

We see both ends of the spectrum in Daniel Benjamin's piece, going from the Canadian 'outrage' to calling Ben Johnson 'pitiable'. He starts by calling Ben Johnson's case 'the ugliest story of the 1988 Olympics'; this grabs the reader's attention and he then proceeds to build up Johnson's character for the reader and how important a day it was for the athlete. He even gets the reader on Johnson's side by calling the urine sample 'the indignity of champions'. Although undoubtedly Johnson had cheated, Daniel Benjamin makes the reader sympathise for the athlete by calling him 'a runner who had stumbled into a future stained with disgrace'. The use of the word 'stumbled' and later 'duped' pose Johnson as a victim and suggests that he was either tricked or simply didn't know what he was doing; the effect is that it's harder for the reader to condemn the athlete.

Daniel Benjamin treats the case as a story to be told and he makes sure all the characters' opinions are known. He, throughout creating sympathy for Johnson, injects little details of the public response. As previously stated, Canada was 'outraged', but the incident was also called 'a national embarrassment' by their Sports Minister. It is also said that the "'clean' athletes felt cheated". It is possible that such a negative reaction could be

used to create more pathos by the writer, but its use here (I think) is simply to show both sides of the argument. The piece ends with Daniel Benjamin saying that the scandal was a 'disgrace' but may have served 'one noble purpose'; this proves that he doesn't actually support Johnson.

While Daniel Benjamin wrote as if it was a story, Matthew Yates' text on Olga Yegorova feels like an angry protest, for that is essentially what it is. This is quite obviously the case because he calls Paula Radcliffe's protest 'spot on' and uses his own personal experience of losing his sponsorship for protesting. This is a very personal piece for Yates, which is shown in the numerous uses of the phrase 'drugs cheat' to describe Yegorova, and again where he writes 'hooray for that' when describing police action within cycling.

Much of Matthew Yates' piece is about him promoting his own ideas of what should be done to solve the problem and he calls the government's actions 'feeble' and 'self-serving'. He spends no time giving Yegorova's point of view, but instead calls her representatives 'a new, unscrupulous breed', suggesting that they aren't truly human maybe.

The overall tone of Yates' piece is angry and serves to inspire anger from the reader and encourage action, the last sentence being; 'Let's act now'. It's obvious that Yates wants the audience to take his side as he explains his idea thoroughly while denigrating any others. He wants drastic action to be taken but needs the reader on his side, hence the bias that is shown.

Daniel Benjamin shows the reader the full story, but the text has the unmistakable scent of sympathy to it. He uses phrases of visual power like; 'a trapped animal', 'media horde', and 'retreated' to make the reader remember that Johnson is still a human who makes mistakes and that he is suffering for them. The effect of this is that it allows the reader to come to their own conclusions about the story and not condemn Johnson based on his one mistake.

The purpose of each piece affects the content. Benjamin's purpose for his text is to tell the full story and so that is exactly what makes up his text. However, Yates' desire is to encourage public outcry against the 'drug cheats', as he refers to them, and

as a result his piece lacks any of Yegorova's side of the story and he certainly leaves no place for sympathy.

While there is such a massive difference as this, there is still a place for common ground. This similarity is found in the sort of language the two writers use to describe the athletes. They both use powerful adjectives to describe the athletes' phenomenal performances, Benjamin using; 'explosive' and 'almost inexplicable', and Yates using; 'destructive' and calling it 'superhuman'. They are both very visual with their wording, using the phrases 'shadowy world' and 'dark side' to use the age old darkness versus light idea of good and evil. But while both depict cheating as 'evil', the way in which the athletes' involvement is shown is completely different. Yegorova is simply called a 'drugs cheat' and her representatives 'unscrupulous', whereas Johnson is the 'trapped animal' held captive in this 'shadowy world'. Johnson was given the benefit of the doubt, in contrast to the damnation given to what has become common in sport today.

Benjamin's point was to tell the story of the 1988 games, which means that the target audience is one which has little to no knowledge of the event. Yates' piece is directed at the reader and makes them involved. His audience is one who, like him, is angered by Yegorova's actions and the impact of this is that his language changes to speak directly to this group. The purpose of and the audience for each text are tightly knit.

Simply put, if this was a crime scene and the writers were police who had just broken into a room to find a crying man and another escaping through the window, Benjamin would comfort the crying man while Yates would chase after the other. Benjamin sees the person, Yates sees the issue.

Commentary

The response to the two texts shows features characteristic of Exceptional Performance.

- A balanced approach to both texts demonstrates confident and well-developed analysis.
- A clear awareness of audience is shown.
- An appropriate tone is sustained.
- The writer makes detailed references to language and style, for example 'makes the reader sympathise with the athlete... 'who had stumbled into a future stained with disgrace', ' 'stumbled' and later 'duped' pose Johnson as a victim' ' and ' 'Yegorova...a new, unscrupulous breed', suggesting that they aren't truly human' '.
- The writer cross-references to compare and contrast the texts.
- The writer gives a personal response.

Way forward

- Consideration of the impact of presentational devices in non-literary texts.

11. Wallis and Orwell on hunting (features of Exceptional Performance)

Compare and contrast the texts 'Different classes who are brought together by the thrill of the chase'. (*Daily Express*, 4 November 1997) by Lynne Wallis and 'Shooting an Elephant' by George Orwell

The two passages by Lynne Wallis and George Orwell are about hunting but focus on two completely different aspects of the sport. The article by Lynne Wallis focuses mainly on the different social groups that participate in the sport and those who oppose the sport entirely. The article is written very light heartedly as opposed to Orwell, who focuses on the animal in his passage, 'Shooting an elephant', and uses various writing techniques and language to share his experience and feelings.

Lynne Wallis entitles the first part of her article, 'Different classes brought together by the thrill of the chase', which gives the reader the impression that the sport of hunting unites people, but as Wallis soon uncovers it is mostly a 'social' sport rather than a competitive sport. One of the aims of the article is to mock people involved in the sport. Lynne makes this clear in the opening paragraph when she describes what Roderick Moor is wearing, '....spruced up in hacking jacket, pristine breeches and a pair of £300 'mahogany' top riding boots'. It was not essential for Wallis to mention the '£300 mahogany top riding boots' but it does show how socially important it was for such people to look 'spruced up'.

She clearly scorns the whole social aspect when she illustrates the attire of the ladies ' in foxy ties and hair nets' and 'Their backs are ramrod straight' which, in the period that the article was written, could be considered as a sign of wealth and class. The names of the people mentioned in this article can also be associated with the upper-classes and Wallis mentions their full names to convey this to the readers – names such as 'Roderick and Arubella Moore', 'Christopher Lawrence-Price', 'Antonia Johnson', 'Diana Moore' and 'Marilyn Husbands' who is a 'girlish fortysomething'.

Wallis then picks up on the fact that 'Marilyn Husbands' over-exaggerates the class difference between the people who participate in the sport and those who don't. The author clearly mocks her when she says 'is keen to emphasize that hunting isn't a class thing. She says (three times): I'm terribly ordinary'. Wallis is keen to convey the blatant differences in society when she scorns the way the wealthy speak '(to cries of 'Oh no, she's fallen orf')'. Wallis shows that there is a token lollipop lady and electrician, who are part of the hunting group, but they have one of the worst jobs. In the end of the first part of the article we are made aware that Lynne Wallis does not really care about hunting and the people involved but was more interested in providing her readers with a light-hearted, amusing and entertaining piece of reporting. 'Right, wrong, nice or nasty, I'm still disappointed that I didn't hear a single 'Tally Ho!' all day'.

The title of the second part of Lynne Wallis's article is, 'In hot pursuit, saboteurs on the hunt's trail'. It gives the reader the impression that the hunt monitors interfere with the hunters and their planned hunt expeditions. It also gives a somewhat negative view of the hunt monitors as they are described as 'saboteurs'. There is a very distinct difference between the hunters and the hunt monitors and where they come from, as Wallis describes the car in which the hunt monitors from 'The League Against Cruel Sports' arrive in as a 'battered old vehicle'. Lynne Wallis implies that the people who are hunt monitors have nothing to do and are doing this as a sort of hobby as opposed to truly believing in it. She also mocks their attempts to stop hunting parties from hunting when she says, 'relays locations to the radio to the others, speaking in code to foil unwanted listeners'.

The people involved are either retired 'draftsman' like Ken James who now prefers 'to watch wildlife' or housewives like 'Daphne Rickerts' and even brother and sister teams like 'Rachel and Peter White'. To the hunt monitors this is rather exciting and also a 'game'; when Ken says, 'we got him done for cruelty because we had it all on video', he said 'triumphantly'. In the last line of the article, Wallis scorns one of the monitors, when she shows his lack of thought as he says, 'We'll never get a perfect world while humans are in it', which is rather impractical as, if humans were no longer on the earth, neither would any of the hunt monitors be here.

The two sections of the article work well together as they show two sides in the continuing saga for and against the sport of hunting. The first part portrays the hunters as people who do it for the fun of it rather than the competitive aspect of the sport, whereas the second part conveys the 'strong' views of the opposing hunt monitors who do not believe in hunting as a credible sport. However, there is some common ground in the tone and aims of the articles as both have been written in a light hearted and entertaining manner. There is also evidence of Wallis mocking both groups involved in hunting, which brings the true aims of the article to light which is to entertain readers and not really to focus on the animals who should be the most important party involved in the sport.

'Shooting an elephant' by George Orwell is a complete contrast with the above article as he focuses on the animals involved in the hunt, which in this case is an elephant. He starts his passage by almost admitting that he had done something wrong when he says, 'But I did not want to shoot the elephant', which also gives the reader a clearer view what the passage is about. In the first paragraph we see Orwell's regret about shooting the elephant when he says, 'it seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him', 'never wanted to', and 'but I had got to act quickly' which conveys that he was pressured into shooting the elephant by the 'natives'.

The attitude of the natives is very inconsiderate towards the magnificent creature that they wanted slaughtered. Orwell felt pressured to do something that he did not want to do but, because of the 'watchful faces behind... with the crowd watching me', he felt he had to. Orwell had a feeling that if he did not do what the natives asked of him, he would be ridiculed. 'A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives': and so in general he isn't frightened'. At this point Orwell had decided what he should do as if he didn't, 'some of them would laugh. That would never do'. The nervous anticipation of the natives at this stage is clear. 'The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low happy sigh, as people who see the theatre curtain go up at last', conveys the enthusiasm the natives were feeling as one usually associates the curtain opening as something exciting. Orwell uses a little sarcasm when he says, 'They were going to have their bit

of fun after all', to show his disrespect for the natives.

Orwell uses a rather long build up to describe the death of the elephant which could reflect the agony the elephant was going through and the anguish of the long wait for Orwell until the elephant finally dies. 'I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd', which conveys Orwell's lack of respect for the natives. When the bullet had penetrated the elephant's skin, 'a mysterious, terrible change has come over the elephant' which emphasizes the impact of the shot and the pain the elephant felt. 'An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him', conveys that the elephant has lost control of his mental abilities and almost seems lifeless in that he could no longer function normally.

After Orwell had fired for the second time the elephant 'climbed with desperate slowness to his feet' 'weakly . . . sagging and head dropping' all emphasizing the desperation for the elephant to stay alive. Orwell uses a short sentence, 'I fired a third time', which conveys the impact of the third bullet to penetrate the already suffering elephant and 'the shot that did it for him' conveys that this was the shot that would force the elephant to acknowledge defeat and die.

The unkind nature of the natives is shown when he describes them as 'racing past me across the mud'. Orwell is surprised that after all that the elephant was not dead – 'never rising again, but was not dead'. The phrase, 'pale pink throat', suggests the vulnerability of the elephant in that pale pink is a very delicate colour. The simile, 'like red velvet', is used to describe the blood of the elephant as red is a bold and rich colour. This also adds impact to the paragraph as this is the only time such a vivid and bold colour is mentioned. 'Powerless to move and yet powerless to die', suggests the elephant has been rendered powerless by the torture and agony that it had to endure. The last line of the passage, 'I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon', shows the brutality of the natives and the disbelief in Orwell's mind that he had actually shot an elephant.

In my opinion the article by Lynne Wallis aimed to entertain readers and provide a light hearted view on the sport of hunting and it did so successfully. The passage by George Orwell is more emotional than that of Lynne Wallis and used various writing techniques to convey the writer's feelings as he records what

must have been a life changing experience. The passage was also more personal and focused more on the animal than just purely the people involved. The use of emotive language evoked empathy for the elephant as well as George Orwell in that he did not really want to shoot the elephant. In my opinion both articles were successful in what they set out to achieve.

Commentary

The comparison of texts demonstrates features characteristic of Exceptional Performance.

- The writer offers a sustained response to demanding texts.
- Ideas are developed with reference to language and structure.
- The writer consistently makes confident and sustainable comparisons between the texts.



3

Writing – imaginative, personal
and creative

12. Devastation (features of Level 7)

Devastation

Sitting on the warming sand, unusually ice-cold waves crawled almost silently up the beach, then gently crashed upon the shore. I heaved a sigh. This was an incredible moment, the rising sun reflected off the calm ocean onto the sand, giving the crisp, gentle morning a warm touch, like a freshly painted oil picture – and no less stunning.

Pushing my hands deep into the moist sand, I slowly rose from my stunted position. I stretched my hands into the air, then circled them back to my sides. Yawning deeply I checked my watch. 6:30. Five hours since I had angrily stormed off to this paradise, after a vehement argument with my mother. Five hours since I had been waiting for him, for Richie – my life.

Thoughtfully, I placed one foot directly in front of the other. I could feel the grainy sand ease its way through my bare toes. I carefully avoided a sharp looking shell, then picked it up and pocketed it, perhaps I could take a small piece of this paradise home with me and look at it after another hellish supper with my mother. I gently tucked my greasy, long brown hair behind my ears, as I did, I heard unco-ordinated, heavy footsteps almost tumbling down the bank of rounded pebbles that I knew lay behind me. Turning, a wide smile spread quickly onto my face, revealing my crooked teeth, but I didn't care. I pushed the thought aside.

Stopping dead, Richie stared blankly in my general direction. I sprinted straight up to him and enveloped him in a hug. "Richie!" I exclaimed. "I knew you'd come. I've been sat here for ages and..." I cut myself short. "Richie?" He felt limp against me, the usual squeeze of my arm and the soft placing of his hand on my shoulder were missing. Suspiciously, I pulled myself away from him. Still no answer. Something was wrong. All of the happiness I had hoped would come drained away and the pain from earlier re-instilled itself. The sight of Richie's wide eyes, the deep sparkling pools of the ocean, his trim blond hair with the kink just behind his tiny, left ear: these were supposed to enthrall me – not worry me.

“Jess”. A simple statement, yet relief started to ebb its way into my system. “We need to talk.” Beckoning, he started to clamber back up the rocky ascent, not checking to see if I was following. Anxiety now became the core of my feelings and the arms of trees in the distance seemed to prod and poke at my exposed emotions. Unwillingly, I followed. I wanted to stay here, where the mirror of the sea could graciously reflect how I wanted to feel and deflect taunting and unfamiliar feelings.

After what seemed like an age, a lifetime, an eternity of harsh grass and rock underfoot, I reached Richie. Deafening silence drummed its way into my head like an army of drunken soldiers. Richie paused. “Jess.” That name again, was it my own. The sudden clash of serenity and uncertainty seemed to have driven me to a temporary madness.

“I . . . I don’t really know how to say this but . . . ” This couldn’t be. Was it. My heart started to plummet. “I’ve found someone else.” I sank to the ground. “I’m sorry. It’s not going to work”. With one last look, one powerful glance into my eyes, he pivoted and left. Gone. I tried to call after him. Stop him. I opened my mouth but no sound was to succeed. Richie’s now darkened silhouette faded into the horizon. My insides mimicked the hollowness of the deep, dark holes that could be found under the sea.

Slumping further onto the floor, thoughts began swirling around me like a deathly whirlpool. Time passed; seconds, minutes, hours. Forcing myself to my feet, I disconcertedly fumbled my way down to the beach. The sun had risen fully now and its happy glare seemed to tease me. However completely contrast to that of nature; a single tear rolled down my face, soon to be followed by streams and streams of them, each tear lost in the crowd of sadness – all trying to prove the same thing. Though what, I didn’t know.

Weakened legs carried the rest of my trembling body away: they seemed to know their own path. As I walked aimlessly along the infinite beach, the ache faded away and emptiness took its place. I now didn’t care if shells cut up my feet – surely it could not be any more painful than when it happened to the heart.

A car door slammed shut somewhere in the distance, but I didn’t really hear or care about it. Just seconds later the screamed version

of my name shattered the air, the mirror of the sea was broken and I was snapped back to a certain sense of reality – which went as quickly as it had come. Gradually but certainly, I turned around – to see my mothers’ pale and desperate looking face heading toward me. Scooping me into her arms she pulled me tight.

“I...I...I” Stuttering: it was all I could manage.

“I know, sweetheart, it’s OK – I know” and she did.

Still cradling me she led me back to the car.

Later that evening, as the sun set and darkness blanketed the beach, a pair of shoes were touched by the fingers of the sea and soon washed away into a great expanse that was the ocean.

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7. The positive characteristics of the piece are:

- It is a well-shaped narrative, which is sustained and developed.
- The writing is confident and coherent.
- It has a strong opening, evoking both scene and situation.
- The writer consciously selects details which affect the reader’s response.
- The writer is ambitious in the choice of sentence structures and vocabulary.

Way forward

- The writer should vary sentence openings more – too many beginning with participles.
- A more precise choice of vocabulary is required at times, as the selection doesn’t always convey the intended effect, for example ‘the mirror of the sea could graciously reflect how I wanted to feel’.
- Choice of similes needs greater sophistication, as they can work against the effectiveness of the piece, for example ‘deafening silence drummed its way into my head like an army of drunken soldiers’.
- The temptation to create a dramatic ending should be resisted, as it can leave the reader unconvinced.

13. Notes from an American Airport (features of Level 7)

Notes from an American Airport

I wonder if they design these seats to make you as uncomfortable as possible. I am on an Easyjet plane coming to Miami and I have been sat in this chair for six hours so far and my feet and legs are now numb. I have recently been preoccupying myself by remembering the colours and patterns on these stupid chairs but then I got bored.

'BEEP' I look up warily. 'Ladies and Gentlemen we are now proceeding to land so could you please fasten your seatbelts'. I fastened my seatbelt and turned to look outside the window but I couldn't see anything as the lady next to me had closed it in an attempt to get some sleep. She let out a massive snore that threatened to shake the whole plane. She was coming back home to Miami. She had introduced herself to me as Cadence McCall. I looked at her and saw that she was a bit on the heavy side and had a ton of make up on. At the beginning of the flight she had told me all about her life but I had switched off as I hadn't really understood her accent and she was just going on and on. I gently nudged her and told her that we were now starting to land. She thanked me profusely for waking her up, which just made me wish that I had left her snoring.

As the plane landed, with the usual jerkiness, I numbly reached up for my hand luggage. After six hours on the plane everyone is tired and moody. There are no happy smiles or buzzing chatter as everyone is too irritable and just wants to get off the plane. 'Ouch' the lady next to me shoved me with her bulging pink rucksack. I frowned at her and made my way slowly down the plane. 'Thank you for flying with Easy Jet. We hope you have enjoyed your flight.' Said the heavily made up flight attendant with a bright false smile.

As I left the plane, the heat hit me with all its brute force. I grumbled as I took off my jacket and re arranged my rucksack so I was more comfortable. There was a big white building in front of me, which I assumed was the airport terminal. I walked over with everyone else to the tram, hopped in and tried to find a space.

As I approached customs, I noticed a big cheery man telling us to please form an orderly line. I rolled my eyes: all these Americans are so over friendly and chirpy all the time. It's starting to get on my nerves and I've only been in this country for less than thirty minutes. There were also men in army uniforms patrolling the lines with dogs.

As they walked past some one you could see that person visibly hoping that they hadn't done anything wrong. I watched as one woman opened her bag because the dog had stopped at her, having sniffed something forbidden. I craned my neck forward in an attempt to get a better view of what it was. Then sighed; it was a bunch of bananas.

There were men with guns watching me as I slowly made my way forward towards the desk. After all the terrorist threats and acts I suppose I can understand all the caution but that doesn't stop it being annoying and also instead of making me feel safer, it actually makes me feel more insecure. It makes me feel nervous and guilty even though I know I have done nothing wrong. I quickly got my passport stamped and nearly ran out toward the luggage.

The arrival terminal was massive, open plan, and obviously new. It was such a different atmosphere from customs as well. Everyone seemed happier as they knew that they would soon be out of here and the hostility towards each other had vanished. I spotted the lady from the plane entering the toilets with a smile of relief on her face. Probably happy to actually get to some decent toilets I thought. I grabbed my suitcase off the conveyor belt and placed it on the trolley.

As I was walking out I noticed that there were hotel rooms all around us. There was a sign on the wall advertising the new hotel that was actually built inside the airport. It looked like a five star hotel. Then I rolled my eyes, thinking to myself that I hadn't even gotten outside and I was already looking at advertising. My friend, Kathy, went on a tour of America last year and she had already warned me about the extent Americans will go to to advertise their business. Apparently most of it was just a big tourist trap. There were also the famous fast food restaurants alongside the hotel. Classy.

I eventually found the desk I was looking for, RentACar. 'Urm, hi. My name is Catrin Watkins. I have reserved a car?' I said to the name behind the desk. 'Okay, jus' lemme put your name in 'ere now and ill see wha' I can do for ya' he said with a big grin on his face. As he began fiddling around with the computer I looked around closely. Everyone I saw at the desks had big bright smiles on their faces, just like this man here. I looked at his nametag; it said his name was Mickey. 'Well here ya go. Here is your key and if ya'd just like to sign there for me please lil missy.... Thank ya now and please 'ave a good holiday here in Miami. Remember if there is anything ya wan' at all, jus' give us a call.'

I found my car without any hassle and set about putting my luggage in the boot. 'Do ya wan' a hand there putting your stuff in the trunk'. Another friendly American was walking over to me. Wait a minute I thought frowning, what is a trunk? I racked my brains trying to think. The man saw my confused face and laughed, 'Where ya from?' He looked at my pale skin 'England? Scotland?'

'No, actually I'm from Wales.' I retorted, still trying to think what a trunk was.

'O righ'. Is that a city in England?' He asked, confused.

'No but it's a country right next to England.'

'Oooo well I suppose ya learn something new everyday. Now do ya wan' a hand puttin' your luggage in the trunk, or a boot I think ya call it?'

'Yes please' I said feeling foolish that I hadn't realised he meant the boot.

'Okay there ya go mam, have a good holiday here in Miami now. Goodbye'

I got in the car and started to drive cautiously as the Americans drive on the wrong side of the road and I wasn't use to it. All the cars on the road were big monster trucks that made our cars in Wales look pitiful in comparison. I sighed as a big red sports car zoomed through a red light. I can't wait until I can just get to the villa and have a rest.

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7. The positive characteristics of the piece are:

- The light touch/attempt at humour that the writer sustains throughout.
- The writer's choice of details make the situation and the writer's response convincing.
- The personal voice is clear and engaging (for example 'There were men with guns...').
- The writer's use of dialogue and dialect complement the chosen style of writing.

Way forward

- More conscious shaping of the narrative would be an improvement – paragraph openings beginning 'As I...' show an over-reliance on chronology.
- Better control of tenses.
- Better control of vocabulary, to prevent drifting too far into colloquialisms, for example 'stupid chairs' and 'ton of makeup'.
- Paragraphing could be improved, as the final sentence in some paragraphs affects the coherence, for example paragraphs 5 and 9.

14. The It (features of Level 8)

The It

I walk out of the school gates, surrounded by a group of friends, my bag strap cutting into my shoulder slightly, my coat flapping gently in the breeze. A bystander might think I was vaguely normal.

But then...a bystander wouldn't know about the secret.

A rustle in the hedge. Only brief, and anyone else would dismiss it as the wind. But I've learned to spot the little signs. So...he followed me again. He knows the risks.

I walk over to Conor, and we fall into step. We discuss the events of the day, what we might do later, things like that. He makes a suggestion for my latest animation project. We discuss that for a while.

I'm lucky to have Conor around. He helps to take my mind off the secret...and it's seldom on anything else, the rest of the time. Luckily, he hasn't asked any of the inconvenient little questions previous friends have. They dug too deep.

It was quite horrible, what happened to them. I often have nightmares about it.

We continue down the road, me maintaining a fixed smile, and trying to ignore each rustle from the hedge. It's become easier, over the years. I've got used to the system.

I wipe my forehead. It's a hot day, and wearing a black trenchcoat doesn't help. I take the bottle of water from my bag, and take a long drink. I offer Conor some, and he accepts it gratefully.

Once I had a long think about why Conor never asks the little questions my other friends asked. Maybe he has his own secret...knows what it's like, trying to keep things under his hat. It would certainly explain why we get along so well.

A louder rustle. I swear in my mind; it's not that windy, people won't dismiss it that easily. Indeed, a few people look around.

But by that time, he had already found shelter in a large rose bush. I sigh, and wipe my brow again. It is, really, a wonder we've never had to move house to avoid questions. Perhaps it's fear that stops the locals who found something out, or suspect something, doing anything. It would certainly work on me.

We walk on, still talking, ignoring the steady rustles from hedges. I don't like it when he follows me, but I can hardly stop him. I only wish he'd be more stealthy...then again, I could hardly do better.

The conversation turns to the internet, and our favourite websites. We particularly like a certain film reviewer; many is the time we've shared a quiet giggle and a loud chuckle at his idiocy.

I particularly liked it when he marked down a film for a natural bodily function. The makers of the film included even more vomiting in their next film. His theory was that it was done solely to annoy him.

More power to them, I say.

It's good to talk about this film reviewer; his idiocy is so common that it can block out my thoughts of the secret for quite a while.

But he always manages to penetrate my thoughts again...it's the kind of thing that has a way of gripping the mind.

We find ourselves at the traffic lights, approaching the main body of the town. As we go our separate ways, Conor mentions he might come to my house later.

It's generally ok for people to be at my house, even with the secret. I manage to negotiate him out if the way...

...or sometimes the very opposite.

I'm alone now, walking through the town. There aren't any hedges here, and luckily, very few people are looking up. Those who do – that is to say, me – occasionally see a glimpse of a dark figure flitting from rooftop to rooftop.

Perhaps one day, there'll be an alien invasion, and as a UFO comes into view in the sky, people looking at it in awe will see the same dark figure I see.

But that hasn't happened yet.

People who know about the secret often ask me things like 'Does he get in the way of your life?' The answer is, in fact, quite the opposite.

I'm away from the shops now, nearing my home. There are fewer people around. He's a bit lax about stealth around here, but then again, the nearer you get to my house, the more people know or suspect something, so I suppose it's not that unreasonable.

People used to bully me about it. Not unexpected. But that all stopped on my day off. I never found out exactly what happened, but I could hazard a few guesses. They probably deserved it, anyway.

I walk past an alleyway, and hear footsteps. I'm not alone...

'Huwie!' says an amiable-sounding voice.

I step into the alley, and meet the secret's gaze. He grins.

'Coming?' he asks, beckoning. It's a rhetorical question. We fall into step, as Conor and I did what seems like hours ago now.

When we're walking together, we stick to alleys and back streets. As I've mentioned, the people very near my house – as we are now – generally know or suspect, but we shy away, so as not to scare outsiders.

'Any homework?' he asks, getting right to the point, as usual. It's understandable, though – it might be him doing it.

'Science, bit of Maths,' I reply. 'You've really got to stop following me, I'm sure Conor suspects something.'

'He's bright enough not to say, though,' he grins.

It's not long before we get to the house. I unlock the door – my parents are out, which suits us. I switch on the computer, a motion which has become a reflex action. He lounges on the sofa, and flicks on the TV.

'Anything fun happen today?' he asks, smoothing down his hair with long, claw-like fingers.

'I'd think you'd know, you were watching most of the time,' I reply. 'Don't think I didn't notice you in the trees.'

'Whatever happened to the gorse, anyway?' he complains. 'I'd got myself a comfy little corner in there. I had half-full bottle of coke in there, too.'

'Oh, that was me,' I reply. He playfully throws a cushion at me.

I hear a knock at the door.

'Must be Mum,' I say, levering myself out of the comfy groove on my computer chair and going out into the hall.

I open the door, and see Conor.

'Hi,' he says.

The sound of the TV seemed to vanish. I tried to get my legs to move, but to no avail.

'Hey, are there any crisps in the cupboard?' asks the secret, poking his head out of the living room.

An image of how it must look to Conor flashes into my mind – one normal Huw, standing open-mouthed, one other Huw, with claw-like fingers and crimson eyes, looking like nothing more than the more feral kind of vampire.

'I knew it!' declares Conor, punching the air, breaking the agonising silence.

'Huh?' my slack jaw manages to say.

'That's ten quid you owe me!' grins Conor as, to my shock, another Conor leaps down from above my front door, eyes red, fingers pointed.

'Alright, you win...' mutters the new Conor, rummaging in his pockets.

'Well, who would've thought it...' said the secret.

It's not a bad life, having a slightly monstrous twin. Oh, it may make you a little secretive, but at least you each only have to go

to school half the time. And when you have two people with above-average IQ, homework just seems to melt away.

We take turns with everything; there's a mattress permanently set out on the floor of my room. But there are some differences. He's more adventurous, I do creative things, like writing and animation.

Conor, being like us, left unharmed after finding out about us...indeed, it even brought the four of us closer. But the outsiders who called on us unexpectedly, or started telling people, weren't so lucky.

They didn't die. We don't have blood on our hands.

They just hope to their deity of choice (or just plain hope) that we come down with more food and water soon.

THE END

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8. The positive characteristics of the piece are:

- The writer's sophisticated handling of the reader in the opening paragraphs.
- The writer's conscious crafting, which creates a distance between the narrative voice and the events described.
- Flair and originality is evident in the writing.
- Ambition is apparent in the control of characters and events.

Way forward

- Improved control of the complexity of the narrative, for example the unnecessary introduction of the film reviewer.
- The shape of the piece could be improved by greater attention to paragraph length.
- Improving some clumsy phrasing, for example '...looking like nothing more than the more feral kind of vampire'.

15. Trapped (features of Level 8)

Trapped

Don't you just love strawberries? In my opinion, strawberries grown in the greenhouse at the bottom of the garden are the most succulent, ripe and finest quality strawberries you can devour. Better than any you can get from Tesco's. However, I am not the only person who believes this. Little Lily Morrison was just three when she decided to go on an adventure into the unknown, on a mission into her Grandad's greenhouse.

Lilly, or 'Lil' as everyone used to call her, was a blonde haired, blue eyed adorable child whose only passion in life was food. Anything that was put in front of her she gobbled down. Quite surprisingly, fruit of all things was her favourite. Not sweets, not ice cream, but fruit. That is how she had found herself in the greenhouse, stealing all those ripe, sweet strawberries. You see, the door to the greenhouse was open and the temptation got too severe. She had often seen her Grandad strolling out with a few rosy red strawberries wedged in his mouth, and she couldn't fight the lure any more.

Sneaking into the glass palace, the mass of colour overwhelmed Lil. An accumulation of greens, towering above her with leaves that seemed to be twice her size. The vibrant geraniums in coral, fuchsia and pillar box red almost clashed with the vivid yellow of the daisies. Roses in numerous colours, releasing a heavenly scent almost engulfed the child. She had never witnessed such a stunning sight; it was so overwhelming the door to the greenhouse gently shut without her even noticing.

Blissfully unaware that she was now trapped, Lil thought 'Now, where are those strawberries?' The red attracted her first, but it was a tomato plant. She didn't like the pungent smell of the wet soil; however, she did like the puddles that surrounded it! Running over, she jumped into the murky water, coating her pale legs with mud. She looked for a cloth, and spotted one on the other side, draped across the watering can at the foot of the strawberry plant. She forgot the cloth and thought of her stomach. Both hands outstretched, she grabbed as many as she could handle, cramming them into her chops!

Five minutes later, full and very hot, Lil stood up, slightly concerned about the colour of her splattered dress. She thought it was time to go. Sluggishly walking towards the exit, she realised the door was shut. Unable to reach the handle, her little fists banged on the glass. She turned around, looking for an alternative, but to no avail. Lil shouted for Grandad. The beads of sweat trickled down the side of her face as she screamed his name again. Lil's heavy breathing almost echoed around the small, hot house as she ran from one end to the other. A buzzing bee zoomed past Lil's ear. Startled, Lil fell into the cracked terracotta pots, bruising her tiny knees. Resigned to her fate, she started to cry. Rolling onto her back, the rays of the sun clashed onto the windows above her and then into her delicate eyes. They immediately squinted, beginning to water with pain. She fell into a light dream, doubting whether she would ever get out.

'Lil? Oh Lilly what on earth are you doing in here? Ahhh...I can see exactly what you have been doing from the state of your dress!'. It was the serene sound of her Grandad's voice. Lil sprung up, doing a hop, skip and jump towards her Grandad. Her stained hands extended outwards, she leapt into his arms, clutching his shirt, never wanting to let go. Released from her entrapment, Lil was very grateful for her new found freedom as the last ten minutes had seemed like an eternity.

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8. The positive characteristics are:

- The writer shows flair and originality and engages the reader from the outset.
- The writer sustains the reader's interest without straying outside personal experience and into melodrama.
- An ability to empathise with, and communicate, the thoughts and feelings of a child is demonstrated.
- The quality of the description, for example paragraph 3.
- The complexity of sentences the writer employs, building to the climax in the fifth paragraph.

Way forward

- Avoiding occasional grammatical slips.
- Refining the use of the comma.

16. To Be Invisible (features of Exceptional Performance)

To Be Invisible

Concentrating hard on the floor, I worked my way along the narrow corridor alone. Despite it being the first day back after the summer, I had already grown tired of my raucous classmates and their critical attitudes. I bowed my head lower, causing a mane of dirty-blond hair to obscure my ever-anxious face: I had concluded long ago that if I couldn't see anyone, then no one could see me.

Where were my friends? I had already combed every corner of the school, searching each of last year's secret hideouts – no one. Just as I was about to give up, I caught sight of a large huddle of people hovering eagerly around a newly pinned-up notice. Squinting, I read the words 'CAST FOR SCHOOL PRODUCTION' printed boldly at the top of the crisp, white sheet, before hurriedly moving on. A familiar shiver shot through every nerve in my body at the mere thought of being up on that stage, with...

'Maria! You did it!!!' I was jolted sharply back to consciousness by the shrill sound of my name, followed by a pair of arms enveloping me into an excited embrace. I stared at Jake and Emma who were grinning at me expectantly, pleased that my two best friends had not in fact deserted me.

'D-d-did w-what, exactly?' I stammered, still desperately gasping for breath after being strangled by Jake.

'You got the main part in the show!' squealed Emma. I began to laugh hysterically – me? I was suddenly acutely aware that the room had gone eerily silent; it was as if a wave of death had swept down the corridor, leaving its victims wide-mouthed, their eyes fixed on my perplexed, cowering figure. Slowly, like a volcano about to erupt, the sound of voices returned; a swarm of bees buzzing, talking as though I didn't exist:

'Her? You've got to be joking!'

'How did *she* get it? I heard she never attended a drama lesson in three years!'

'They must have made a mistake on the notice... got her name mixed up with mine...'

As Jake and Emma dragged me stiffly away from the ominous crowds, I tried again to reason with Emma: 'But you were joking,' I asked timidly. 'Right? I mean, I didn't even audition, did I? Why would I do that? I'd never...' I trailed off. I began to comprehend what I had done. I *had* auditioned! At the end of last year...I only did it to get out of my dreaded weekly Games lesson. I never thought I'd stand a chance of getting even a tiny part in the show. I was the girl who mimed the hymn in every assembly and would religiously be 'ill' every time Drama came around. I didn't *want* a part in the play! Admittedly, I loved atmosphere of the stage: the endless spectrum of multicoloured lights illuminating the performers; singing and dancing without a care in the world. But me...I was too afraid. All the things that could go wrong! Besides...

'You know that my—'

'Aim in life is to become invisible?' interrupted Jake, completing my sentence. 'Yes, you've told us before. But this is a really big thing – it'd be amazing!' Exactly. I always ran in the opposite direction of Really Big Things – they were far too intimidating and normally involved other people, most of whom I disliked.

After a hurried goodbye I set off, for the first time in five years, *towards* the Drama room. Before I had time to talk myself out of it, I knocked apprehensively on the hollow wooden door. Almost instantaneously, the door swung wildly open and I was greeted by our friendly, but somewhat eccentric, Drama teacher. The pungent smell of the freshly painted scenery filled my nostrils, sickening me. As she warmly congratulated me on my 'achievement', I stood there in trepidation, tugging at the strands on my frayed jumper, gazing vacantly at the dark floor, knowing that soon I would have to explain everything. So I tried:

'Um, well, thanks, miss...' I began, my voice high pitched and my hands quivering. *Just do it*, I told myself. 'But I can't really do it because I'm too scared and I'll do something wrong and anyway I only auditioned so I could miss Games and I never thought I was any good and I've never even been to Drama, so I don't know

why you'd want me in it...' Then I ran.

We filed excitedly into our vast school hall, which looked barely recognisable, having been decorated elaborately for the occasion. I leant towards Jake as he anxiously leafed through our programme, searching for the cast page. There it was! Printed at the top of the page, first on the list, was the name 'Emma Wilson'. We smiled at each other, proud of our best friend. By dropping out, I had given Emma what she had always wanted, and for once I felt relaxed; I was safe here in my seat.

The hall began to darken and the crimson curtains opened, inviting the audience in. I was enthralled: the dazzling glow of kaleidoscopic lights reflected off Emma's costume like precious gems; rubies, sapphires and emeralds glittered and glistened, dancing in front of my eyes. Alluring songs kept me hypnotised, my eyes glassy, in a faraway land. *It could have been me*, echoed a distant voice inside my head.

'Are you alright?' whispered Jake, as though reading my thoughts. My eyes swam and I blinked, allowing a solitary teardrop to fall through my thick eyelashes. As I felt this tear trace a shaky line down my face, tickling my cheek, I remembered what so many people had told me: you only regret what you don't do. And they were right.

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of Exceptional Performance. The positive characteristics are:

- The skill with which the persona is created and sustained by the writer.
- The perceptive way in which the writer handles a familiar setting.
- The realistic and convincing dialogue.
- The overall shape, which builds throughout to a most satisfying ending.

17. The City (features of Exceptional Performance)

The City

Casting long shadows across the city, the fiery sun begins to set. The great towering buildings create vivid silhouettes against the sky, standing like giants towards the coming night. The first lights blink on across the city, shedding an artificial light. The buildings, which grow ever grander as the eye approaches the centre, stand as a testament to iron and steel and many give out an impersonal and uncomfortable aura. However one building appears to have been loved by its owners. On its roof it has a small garden and greenhouse. The building, made from yellowish stone, has small reassuring lights that suggest it is homely. In the small garden on the roof of the building, a tiny old woman potters around. She wears a thickly knitted blue cardigan with large circular buttons on it, tight navy blue trouser pulled up above her plump midriff and a white patterned apron. Bending down on all fours, she pulls up a thick green weed, her hands are stained muddy brown and her fingernails are encrusted with greenery. A strong earthy smell emanates as she stands, surveying the darkening city. Her face is lined with wrinkles, and jutting from her top lip are painfully obvious hairs. Her skin is leathery and she leans over in a hunched manner as though standing causes her pain.

Across from this building, a tall, nameless, faceless office block stretches high into the sky. Made from a stained bleak concrete, the building appears soviet. The halogen lights switched on within scream purely of efficiency over comfort. Through one of the top floor windows, a man is clearly visible regarding the city. Wearing a bland white t-shirt, and a tie that has a rather foul pattern on it, he fits all categories labelling him as a stereotypical office worker. He is approaching his mid forties. A greying and receding hairline and an overbearing stomach define him. His brown eyes are tired and surrounded by frown lines; under his shirt visible sweat patches can be seen. He fills up a small paper cup with water from a humming water cooler and proceeds to press several buttons on his blackberry. Vibrating suddenly, the phone lights up and commences playing a cheap polyphonic version of Greensleeves. Shocked by the sudden noise, the man spills the half filled paper cup over himself, the man mutters a profanity to himself, and bends down to clean up the mess.

On the streets below, the blare of car horns is audible above the voices of angry drivers. Traffic jams snake through the packed streets, and steam rushes out of underground vents as though a dragon rests beneath the city. On the pavements, pedestrians try to avoid the filth that built up through the day. Ducking and weaving through the crowds of people, a young woman makes her way home. In one arm, she grasps a large, brown paper bag against her chest and in the other she clutches the hand of a small boy. The woman wears an elongated, brown, leather coat. Through the top of her bag, her groceries peek out, threatening to spill out at any second in an avalanche of carrots and milk. Her bleached streaks glow golden in the last of the day's sun shining against the rest of her shoulder length brown hair. Her skin is pale and she has the easy good looks of an actress, however her eyes are unique. They are startlingly grey, the colour of clouds on a stormy day. Her slim figure is completely hidden by the large coat she wears, which caught in a sudden fresh breeze, is lifted and billows out behind her like the sails of a ship; she stops momentarily, tightens her coat and continues walking at a break neck pace. The boy is almost being dragged by this point. He drops a small toy and begins to moan, the woman noticing increased resistance to her grip looks back. Spotting the small toy she backtracks several steps and retrieves it. As she stands again, several apples amble out of the bag. As she scoops up the runaway apples, she scolds the small boy and begins weaving down the street.

The cars continue their incessant wailing and the city experiences cacophonies of sound. The last of the day's heat rises, making the whole city shimmer. It is another day in the city.

The blood red sun, obscured by clouds of gas and dust begins to set over the wounded city. The buildings, which just 24 hours earlier stood tall and proud now barely stood at all, fallen temples to architecture. Great masses of rubble, collapsed in the street, and entire chunks of buildings missing. From all across the city arises the disturbing sound of a 1000 sirens wailing in unison, even worse in certain areas is the sound of women and children screaming and crying. Lighting the city even more than the rapidly disappearing sun are great fires that stretch 40 feet into the air that had spread earlier like a pandemic. The flames replaced the lights which were normally beginning to appear at

this time. In one area a small building, once made from a yellowish stone is nothing more than a pile of snapped bricks and rubble. Outside on the street weeping like a willow stands a short elderly woman. She wears a thickly knitted cardigan caked in dust and with several large circular buttons torn away, a pair of tight navy blue torn trousers and the tattered remains of what used to be an apron. Tears mix with dirt on her leathery face and fall creating streaks that stretch down her cheeks. Bloodied and broke, her fingernails have a thick coating of dirt. Her eyes well up with tears and begin to overflow as small, sharp sobs emanate from her parched throat. Her wrinkly face squints as tears flood her face. She bends over and struggles with a large chunk of rock, her face winces in pain but she persists and lifts the slab of rock away.

Across the street a building with no personality gives way to flames. The lower floors, already consumed by the ruthless fire are blackened and burnt and the flames grow ever higher. Near the top of the building an overweight man in his mid forties pounds against the window. He hoarsely screams, 'help!' repeatedly as he regards a scene of devastation. Sweat covers his brow and drips down mingling with the tears that flow from his tired brown eyes. He picks up his phone and calls an emergency number but throws it away in disgust when he hears a recorded message. The man momentarily turns insane lashing out and hitting anything he can: his desk, his computer, his lamp, before subsiding into a corner placing his head into his hands. Pulling himself together, he stands up and mops his brow. Smoke begins billowing into the room, coughing and squinting through the smoke the man feels his way to the window and begins to bang the window again.

Outside the city demonstrates a sense of total chaos, whilst some cars speed down the ruined streets, others are pinned down beneath tons of rubble, and pandemonium erupts like a volcano. Many fire hydrants are cracked and shoot water high into the air. Massive cracks spread like a spiders web, splitting open the ground, threatening to swallow people and cars. Gas hisses from underground pipes. The hordes of people recognising the danger begin to run away screaming. Sewage pipes burst firing their contents high into the air, as the green liquid falls back to earth it begins to form into puddles. Among the crowds, is a running

young woman clasping a young boy tightly against her chest. The small boy in her arms bawls openly, and through the look on her face it is clear this distresses her. The boy begins screaming the word 'mummy,' desperately and repeatedly. Her bleached streaks are grey under a thick layer of dust and ash, now perfectly matching her eyes. Her complexion is hidden though not by makeup as normally would be the case. On one side of her face a torrent of crimson flows from a deep cut above her cheek. She stops and her eyes dart left and right like an animal on the lookout for a hunter. She begins running again through the crowded streets.

Helicopters hover above the packed streets with their searchlights blazing like miniature suns. The winds from the rotor blades whip up the fine dust that has settled into small sandstorms. It is another day in the city.

Commentary

The writing demonstrates features characteristic of Exceptional Performance. The positive characteristics are:

- The sophistication of the opening – establishing the vastness of the city before zooming in to the old woman and her actions – which is then sustained throughout the piece.
- The confidence and control the writer shows in the handling of a complex structure.
- The writer's sensitive treatment of the characters.
- The natural use of metaphor, for example 'avalanche of carrots and milk' and 'the wounded city'.
- The tightness of the writing – nothing is wasted.
- The impact of the piece.



4

Writing – transactional

18. Letter to the editor concerning the dangers of fireworks (features of Level 7)

Big House,
Langoed,
Anglesey.
LL11 5ZM
8th November 2008.

The Editor,
The North Wales Post,
Menai Bridge.

Dear Sir,

I feel that I should express my opinion on what I feel to be a subject of much concern: the danger of fireworks.

This danger is constantly being overlooked by all, who take fireworks for granted. What a lot of people don't realise is that fireworks are extremely dangerous, especially in the hands of foolish teenagers. More people are killed or at least hurt in incidents on bonfire night than people are attacked by sharks, so why are there safety precautions related to the latter and yet hardly so at all with the former?

Just a few days ago a group of five reckless teenager, who could not wait for November 5th, tried to set off half a dozen fireworks all at once. As a result of this easily avoidable situation, three of the five were in varying degrees, injured as all six of the rockets shot off horizontally in all directions. Although it was the teenagers' foolishness that led to this serious incident they not entirely to blame. They should never have been allowed to purchase these death traps at that age. You would not let your children buy a gun, so why let them buy fireworks?

If the many deaths connected with fireworks are not enough to persuade the government to act – what about the animals? Every year I fear for my cat on bonfire night – as well as before and after that day. Most animals we keep as pets have far more efficient hearing than we have, so if most young people get scared of the noise, how do we think a pet would feel? It must be a very traumatic experience for an animal with acute hearing.

In support of my feelings on the issue, I propose a total ban on the sale of fireworks to unlicensed people and for fireworks to be set off only at properly organised venues. Should this not be possible, shop owners must take a more responsible approach when selling to people and must

ensure that those purchasing are legally entitled to do so. If these new rules do not drastically decrease the number injured or killed in firework accidents, I suggest a total ban on the sale of fireworks.

The present situation is unacceptable and I am sure that many of your readers agree with me that something needs to be done and urgently.

Yours faithfully,
Bob Davids

Commentary

This letter demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- It is well set out – the addresses, the date, the salutation and closure.
- The writer's tone is largely appropriate – it reads like a letter to a newspaper expressing a legitimate concern.
- It is well organised. The writer clearly states in the brief opening paragraph the purpose of the letter, making the case in the middle four paragraphs and offering suggestions, finishing with an appropriate conclusion in the final paragraph.
- The writer's adopted persona, an older person speaking mainly about the younger generation, is successfully maintained.
- To highlight the seriousness of the problem the writer has included some dramatic and telling details, for example paragraph 3.
- The writer broadens the argument quite effectively in paragraph 3.
- Awareness of persuasive techniques is shown, for example the use of pointed questions in paragraphs 3 and 4.
- The writing is of appropriate length and the writer maintains a very good level of accuracy throughout.

Way forward

- 'Are' has been omitted in 'they not entirely to blame' in paragraph 3.
- The comparison of the situation regarding fireworks with that regarding sharks is contextually slightly odd.
- At the end of paragraph 3 the sense of audience is less secure.
- The suggestion of a total ban on fireworks is somewhat extreme and unrealistic.

19. Sport: the Centre of My Life (features of Level 7)

Sport: the Centre of My Life

I recently went to Villa Park football ground to watch Aston Villa take on West Ham United with my friend an Aston Villa fan. Boo! They might not be the most amazing teams, however the atmosphere was electric and I had a fabulous day. The chirpy cheering crowd had nothing to do with each other apart from their love of football and unfortunately Aston Villa. But for that one day they were a huge group of feisty friends. So why does this thing called sport grip the nation? Take the Rugby World Cup for example I am quite sure that most of you would have watched some matches or at least the final or heard who won.

Sports: tennis, rugby, netball, football, hockey, etc. What do they all have in common? Apart from the obvious answer that they are all sports they give us enjoyment whether its watching a rugby match, playing a friendly Sunday morning doubles tennis or representing your country at your best sport. I believe that sport is the main stress reliever as you can forget about reality and just have a great time. Some people might get the mood lifting adrenalin rush from watching their favourite footie team win. Go Liverpool! However we get our enjoyment, I am sure that at least once someone has enjoyed something sport related.

Britain is rapidly becoming an extremely obese nation; we are now just behind the United States in the obesity rankings. You might think this is funny but its deadly serious and I mean deadly How can we prevent this inevitability? Apart from eating sensibly a healthy lifestyle is very important. We should do at least thirty minutes of exercise a day even if that's just walking your child or grandchild to the park or playing football at lunchtime. There are enough sports to choose from to keep you motivated. I'm a firm believer that after a hard fitness session, when you feel like collapsing and look like you have stepped out of the so inviting swimming pool you feel a hundred times better than before even if your body odour doesn't. Furthermore you will become more relaxed and therefore get a better nights sleep. Why don't you give it a go? You will definitely experience beneficial results.

How many people own a Facebook, Bebo Myspace account. I'm pretty sure a vast majority of us. Everyone secretly wants the largest number of friends so why not give your friend list a boost

by joining a sports club? It is a great way to make friends, increase your social planner and definitely improve your position on the hottest rankings. Also if you are single and looking for a partner what would you prefer a fat couch potato or a fit surfer dude or muscular rugby player? I know who I would choose. You might be lucky and find your soul mate. What could be more romantic than a relaxing cycle to a beautiful picnic area, where you could enjoy the scenery and flirt wildly, then go back home for some cuddling?

What makes all teenage girls hate sport in schools? Apart from the old frumpy, very grumpy P.E. teachers and the P.E. kit which just totally wrecks the image, I don't see what the main problem is. For me, Games is a lesson where I can unwind, relax and have fun. A great stress reliever whilst playing basketball is to pretend the ball is someone you hate and throw it as hard as you can. (Sometimes at them and then pretend it was a terrible mistake.) I frequently wonder why girls can't enjoy games as much as boys because we are just as competitive. I have the scratches to prove that and we are a hundred times bitchier. We have become a nation obsessed by our image, especially teenage girls, so why don't you just use games and sports in general to burn up those calories from the Chinese meal you had the night before? It might not improve your appearance in the short term but it will benefit your appearance enormously and you won't have detention for not taking part.

I am a full on sport lover and yes some people would and do describe me as a 'Fitness Fanatic'. Every day without fail I perform a sporting activity or watch some form of sport enthusiastically on the T.V. People wonder why. Is it because I have a boring life and nothing better to do? No! I just get massive enjoyment out of what I think is a great pastime hobby. I hope I have persuaded you to follow in my footsteps and take up one of the many great sports accessible to us. However, let me warn you if you are ever going to go swimming. I don't recommend going after a senior ladies aqua aerobic morning. It might not be chlorine you can smell.

Commentary

This magazine article aims to entertain, inform and persuade. It demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 7.

- The writer demonstrates a good grasp of the purpose of the task and an awareness of audience.
- The writing is lively and engaging.
- The piece is well organised and paragraphing is secure.
- The writer achieves a pleasing clarity throughout and a determined effort to hold the attention of the reader.
- Varied arguments are put forward by the writer – the social benefits, the fitness benefits (physical and mental), the enjoyment.
- Though there are errors and omissions the work is largely accurate.

Way forward

- More careful attention could have been given to punctuation. Commas would have helped in a number of places, for example where parenthesis could be used: 'matches or, at least, the final'. Apostrophes are, sometimes, omitted – 'its', 'nights sleep', 'senior ladies aqua aerobic morning'. There is also the occasional spelling error: 'hobbie', 'definitely'.
- The writer strives too hard for effect in places: 'chirpy cheering crowd', 'feisty friends'. The last sentence is, perhaps, a bit misjudged/heavy handed. There is a little naivety, for example the 'Boo' in the second line.
- A little more ambition with regard to vocabulary should be encouraged.

20. Room 101 (features of Level 8)

Room 101

There are not many things in this world that can make me cringe with disgust, or even in horror, but unfortunately, there are of course some people, places and things that I think the world would be a much better place without, and should therefore be sent straight to Room 101, never to be seen again.

This brings me to my first choice, Bruce Forsyth. This man has clearly never watched a video of himself on television, or he would realize that all of his 'jokes' are cringe worthy, and his very presence on a programme is enough to ruin an entire channel for the unfortunate viewer. I personally am under the suspicion that those in the live audiences are either being paid handsomely by the BBC or under some strange hypnotism induced by his moustache. In my opinion, no-one could possibly be more deserving of a place in Room 101 than Ol' Brucey.

The second item that I believe should be placed in Room 101 is opera music. I understand the logic behind it; after all, it is basically just an old fashioned musical, but why the majority of them are in Italian is beyond me. After all, I doubt there are many more than a dozen or so people of my generation who can speak it fluently in this country. Of course, this would be acceptable if the music itself were enjoyable to listen to, but although I don't question the musical ability of the musicians who play and sing at these shows, I just find it all so boring. Admittedly I have never actually been to one personally, but the impressions I have gathered from hearing this style of music in film and television mean that I do not intend to.

The next thing that I wish to place into Room 101 is Sky Plus. I myself am in possession of a Sky Plus box, and although I can barely imagine life without it these days, I still think it deserves a place in Room 101. The sheer amount of hours of my life that I have wasted in front of the television since I acquired the little white box is staggering. Just when one of your recorded programmes ends, you notice a film that you taped the night before, and naturally you have to watch it. And even if you finally get through the wealth of recorded material, there is still the

added gimmick of being able to pause and rewind live television to enjoy. Honestly, the whole thing is like a drug, and there is no way that man is able to handle this kind of power without going insane.

Another item that I wish to add to Room 101 is wasps, definitely not to be confused with bees. In fact, I actually quite like bees. Bees make a pleasant buzzing noise, their fat, furry bodies are almost cute by insect standards, they make honey for us to enjoy and only attack in self defence. Not so with wasps. The sound they make is more of an unpleasant whining noise; they sting without any cause other than they want to scare you away from your hard-earned food, and they don't even have the good grace to die afterward. They seem to have no other purpose on this Earth whatsoever other than to annoy us, and therefore it is my great wish for them to be placed into Room 101.

My penultimate choice for Room 101 placement is fancy meals. It seems that these days you can't go to a single restaurant or pub without the food being covered in some exotic sauce. My simple tastes seem to be completely overlooked. For example, I'll go into a restaurant, and the first thing I'll see on the menu is the sirloin steak. Naturally, I think I've already decided but then I look closer and find that the thing is drizzled in aromatically spiced lemon juice or something like that. Nearly everything on menus nowadays seems to be cooked in something weird or unpleasant sounding. Whatever happened to the days when you could go into a restaurant and order a simple steak and chips, and nothing else? For this reason, I would like to put fancy meals into Room 101.

Finally, I would like to put snow into Room 101. I can't count how many times I've stared hopefully at the flakes drifting down from the sky and dreamed that maybe, just maybe, school will be cancelled, or at least there will be plenty of opportunity for snowball fights and so on. But of course, no such luck. The snow carries on just long enough to stick on the odd car roof or pavement, and then stops. Within a few minutes, the sleet starts and melts what little snow there was, and the next day seems all the worse compared to what might have been. The only snow left is on the odd roof of a car from out of town, and you don't dare take any of it for fear of setting off an alarm. And of course, the irony is that even if a fully fledged blizzard were to occur now, the previously melted snow would prevent any more from

settling. With these things in mind, I feel I am forced to put snow into Room 101.

Obviously, getting rid of these things wouldn't create some kind of Heaven on Earth, but I think you will agree that without these things (especially Bruce Forsyth) the world would be a much better place for future generations to live in.

Commentary

This essay demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8.

- There is a clear, lively introduction to the topic.
- The writer's healthy cynicism and wit run through the work and is entirely appropriate to this task, for example at the end of paragraphs 2 and 5.
- The understatement the writer uses in paragraph 3 works well.
- The writer shapes sentences for effect, for example in paragraph 4.
- The writer shows the ability to reflect maturely, for example in the paragraph devoted to 'Snow'.
- Some ambition is demonstrated in the writing.
- The organisation is good – for example in order to offer a rounded conclusion in the last paragraph the writer refers back to the first 'topic' discussed.
- The piece is sustained and enjoyable.

Way forward

- This is work of high quality, though the writer might have been challenged by a task that required the ability to shape the work more purposefully. The piece plans itself and so the structure is unadventurous.
- There is no sense of a specific audience, an important issue in transactional writing.
- There are a few omissions/slips, for example the commas round 'of course' in the first paragraph and the insecure punctuation of the sentence beginning 'Bees make a . . . '

21. Punk Rock is Hot, Cheap Pop is Not! (features of Level 8)

Punk Rock is Hot, Cheap Pop is Not!

Do you find a day can't pass without you listening to your favourite CD? Are you worried about the withdrawal symptoms you keep getting after not listening to your most wanted music blasting through the speakers of your stereo? It could even be the obsession of looking through the music channels for hours upon end in an attempt to find the one video you want to watch – the annoying thing being you fail to find it anyway!! Most importantly, are you fed up of rap and the cheap pop music you used to find so exhilarating? If any of these symptoms are occurring to you, please do not panic!! The whole of the teenage population is feeling the same (most anyway, especially those who have good taste in music!)

Do not fear, there is a simple explanation, though the cure is yet to be found! Are you asking yourself what the cause of these curious symptoms could be? Are you struggling to find an answer? Well I shall tell you! You have been lucky enough to experience the punk rock extravaganza which has suddenly exploded onto the music scene. This music, not a craze but a revolution, has been quoted in so many great music magazines to date! This is why (if you haven't heard already) I must spread the word for the whole of the 'goodtasteinmusicteenagepopulation' to hear!!!! This music isn't any old rubbish either (as can be said for past, commercialised, cheesy and cheap artists with no real talent whatsoever) but unique, different and, what's more, bursting with young and exciting new talent, eager to be opened and explored!

This new music which has suddenly ignited and spiralled out of control can be said to have started or even re-visited by the gifted band Fall Out Boy! After releasing their breakthrough single 'Sugar we're going down' from their addictive album 'From under the cork tree', their music careers have catapulted into a frenzy, their distinctive sound fulfilling the needs of all. This masterpiece was written by a talented base and lyricist of the group Pete Wentz. Though some say Wentz is overrated, I feel that he deserves all the praise he earns, his well anchored band unleashing yet more ideas and excitement every time we hear more from them. Not only a talented base player, lyricist, a member of arguably one of the most capable bands around and not forgetting their electric album, he

has been gifted with some of the hottest looks around (if you like that sort of guy) BUT!!! There is one guy who can definitely top him! I can hear you waiting in anticipation! Who could this guy be? The truth is he is the lead singer of another addictive band new to the music scene who were inspired by the immense success of Fall Out Boy! Exploding with talent, they have created huge phenomenon in the music world. His name = Brendon Urie. His band (one of the best you will hear throughout your teenage years) = PANIC! AT THE DISCO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Have you heard of them? I hope so! If you haven't do not fear as I shall fill you in with everything you need to know about this new talent, and believe me, everything you hear will definitely be worthwhile. They were signed on by genius Pete Wentz to his Fueled By Ramen (record label) imprint, Decay Dance, only a year ago, even though they had never played a gig in their lives! Fresh from graduating from high school they were taken on tour with Fall Out Boy. From that moment on they have taken the US and UK by storm and are sure for world domination very soon!!

This young quartet, mere babes in the world of music from the lively and colourful city of Las Vegas, have created a whirl of obsession and sensation with their debut album, 'A Fever You Can't Sweat Out.' Unable to get over the uniqueness of their music, I am pulled into the incredible world of Panic! At the Disco and am left wanting more each time. They have created the same feelings for others all over the world achieving sales of an astounding 330,000 copies already!! If a band can create this much of an impact with their music recorded onto a CD, I am unable to imagine the atmosphere they could create live in concert. My insides burn with envy and I go a bright shade of green, as more and more achieve to get tickets to see this impressive band! Tickets are hard to come by, their first headline tour in the UK selling out in a single afternoon.

One thing I can say about Fall Out Boy and Panic! At the Disco, is that they are two bands overflowing with fresh and exciting talent, which is simply out of this world!! I for one could not live without them!!! Teenagers these days, like you and me, are looking for talented musicians who are able to influence so many young people across the globe; young musical talent that will hopefully continue to create yet more electrifying music for generations to come!

I have great advice for you before I go. Have you heard of these bands and their music? If the answers no then what are you waiting for? Buy their albums! They are truly awesome and will lift you into another thrilling world of punk rock!! So, jump on the rollercoaster and join the ride, enjoy yourself and, most importantly, remember to rock on in the best way possible!!

Commentary

This magazine article was produced for a music magazine which has a teenage audience. The writing demonstrates features characteristic of performance at Level 8. Some notable features include:

- The lively opening which immediately engages the reader and sets the context in an interesting and inventive way.
- The energetic tone and appropriate language the writer uses throughout, for example 'not a craze but a revolution', 'catapulted into a frenzy', 'exploding with talent'.
- The secure way in which the writer maintains a sense of audience.
- The writer's clear understanding of the genre and the techniques required in this type of writing.
- The success with which the writer's enthusiasm comes through to the reader.
- The telling final paragraph.

Way forward

- This is an accomplished piece of writing. At times, however, certain devices are used to breaking point such as exclamation marks. While one would normally suffice, here we have double, treble, quadruple use and beyond.
- There is occasional clumsiness, for example 'are sure for' and 'achieve to get tickets'.
- Though mechanically very sound there is the occasional error, for example the omission of the apostrophe in 'if the answers no'.
- The vocabulary is a little repetitious in places.

22. Are Moral Standards of Society Declining? (features of Exceptional Performance)

Are Moral Standards of Society Declining?

In a society filled with short skirts, binge drinking and all night partying, ideas such as chastity seem absurd and old-fashioned. I am speaking to you today, ladies and gentlemen, to argue that we are living in an increasingly immoral society. In a recent interview, the Archbishop of Canterbury described Britain as a “moral vacuum.” Is that a label that you are prepared to live with?

The way we live our lives today is certainly different to the way lives were lead fifty or a hundred years ago, but have you ever stopped to consider whether this is necessarily a good thing? There are many aspects of our modern lifestyles that I feel contribute to the deterioration of moral integrity within society.

Firstly, we always seem to be fixated on our physical appearance. Hem lines are getting shorter and necklines lower and, personally, I cannot comprehend why we women allow ourselves to be subjected to the shameless, perverted stares of the men around us. While not so much a problem as with women, there is still intense pressure on men to look good and wear the right clothes.

You may look at me and say that this isn't such a new thing and that people have always been dying to wear the latest fashions, be they ball gowns or mini skirts. The main problem that I see is the reason why we feel the need to make ourselves into this modern day vision of “sexually attractive.” And this brings me on to my next point.

In centuries past, young men and women strove to find a husband or wife, but these days, families are often the last thing on young people's minds. Many religious traditions say that sex is something that should occur between two married people to show complete devotion to one another. I can only imagine the looks of horror on the faces of the devout 16th century Christians if they saw society now.

It is not uncommon, and is even a way of life for some, to go out on the weekend, drink excessive amounts of alcohol and wake up the next morning lying beside a complete stranger who you are

unlikely to see again. Sex is, in my opinion, no longer being regarded as something special, but as a cheap pleasure that is expected in a relationship. Statistics show that 75% of now married women had premarital sex and that 63% of young people between the ages of fourteen and sixteen are sexually active. If we no longer value something as special as a sexual bond between two people, then surely we value little else?

This lax attitude towards sex has also led to large amounts of abortion. It is estimated that 95% of abortions were not performed because they were necessary, but simply as an alternative to contraception. We are happy to commit this act of barbaric cruelty by killing an unborn child because we simply cannot be bothered with abstinence or straightforward methods of contraception. That really says something to me about the consciences of some people.

Another issue is the way we spend our money and the obsession with fashion. We are always judging people by the clothes they wear and we carelessly throw our money away on ridiculously expensive designer labels. However, have you ever stopped to think how your clothes were made? It is not a secret that many manufacturers treat their workers in third world countries appallingly. These poor people, some as young as five or six, are forced to work from dawn until dusk in unhygienic and dangerous factories for a payment of mere pennies. Some may argue that many companies are fighting this, with high street names such as Topshop and Dorothy Perkins releasing their own fairly made lines of clothing. This is a point that cannot be denied; however, how many of you are willing to pay the extra cost? People will gladly pay hundreds of pounds for the latest Gucci belt or handbag, but yet are unwilling to pay an extra ten pounds for a top that could help the lives of many people, purely because of the label.

Another example of the decline of moral standards is our reaction to charity. Despite large increases in advertising, we are still giving exactly the same amount of money to charity as we were 13 years ago. As Britons, we donate a mere 0.73% of our salaries, while in the US, each citizen donates, on average, more than twice that amount: around 1.67% of their salary. It does, however, seem a necessity for every household to have a new,

widescreen, high definition television, the latest games console, at least one computer, the newest mobile phone and various other items that we simply “could not live without.” Next time you complain that your mobile is last month’s design, take a minute to think about the people who can barely afford food.

For my final point, I would like to remind you of Rhys Jones. He was just 11 years old this summer when he was shot to death outside a pub in Liverpool; his family was left devastated. It sickens me to know that there are people living in this world who can brutally murder innocent children and go on living their lives as normal; not caring. This is not, however, what shocks me the most. The thing that makes me question our very existence is the fact that they believe the culprit to be a mere teenager. The youth of today are becoming more and more rebellious, with children as young as thirteen years old becoming parents. Young girls are determined to become more and more “grown up” and it frightens me to see ten-year-olds in mini skirts and with faces full of make up.

It is up to us to help set an example for future generations. Simple things like reading bed time stories with positive messages can help. Stop obsessing over material possessions; don’t expose children to violence and bad language; get involved with charities: these are things we all must do. It’s the little things that can make all the difference. We need to make a change in our lives, or else future generations will be living in a completely immoral and chaotic world. Is that what you want?

Commentary

This is a speech, the purpose of which is to explain, argue and persuade. The writing demonstrates features characteristic of Exceptional Performance.

- There is a strong sense of an audience being addressed throughout – ‘ladies and gentlemen’, ‘you’, ‘As Britons, we’, ‘Is that what you want?’
- The writer uses a variety of argumentative techniques effectively – the personal voice, reference to eminent people, statistics (used judiciously), appealing to the conscience of the audience, the shaping of sentences, etc.
- The writer’s organisation and development of the argument is impressive as well as the links used between paragraphs, for example between paragraphs 4 and 5. The writer uses the last paragraph not only as a conclusion but to move the argument forward by suggesting how the situation might be improved.
- Technically the writer’s work is very assured – spelling is almost entirely accurate, a range of sentence structures is used as well as a range of punctuation to enhance effect. The writer also employs a wide and appropriate vocabulary.
- The speech is argued throughout in an articulate and clear-minded way. The writer is not afraid to be outspoken and hard hitting.

Way forward

- It would seem to be nit-picking to dwell, for any length of time, on shortcomings. This is transactional writing operating at a sophisticated level. Suffice to say that there is the odd error, for example the misuse of the preposition in ‘different to’, the omission of commas, for example ‘that I feel contribute’, and the misspelling of ‘lead’ in line eight. Some might consider that the concern expressed about the miniskirt becomes a little repetitive.

23. 2 Text or Not 2 Text? (features of Exceptional Performance)

2 Text or Not 2 Text?

Love them or hate them mobile phones are here to stay. Even your granny who said they would 'never catch on' is texting you on a nightly basis to tell you she loves you and hopes the bed bugs won't bite you.

But are they a help or hindrance in today's society? Do they reduce teenagers' literacy skills by excessive use of acronyms? OMG, DEFO. Can they spread or develop bullying by penetrating a person's private life with abusive texts? Absolutely, if misused. Will texting reduce the risk of getting a brain tumour? The scientists tell us, yes, because the further our brain is from the microwaves emitted by the phone, the better. So, holding a phone in your lap to text is better than speaking into a phone held next to your ear. Do they stop your mother panicking when you've gone to town to get a haircut, but she thinks you may have been taken hostage by street robbers? No? Nor mine.

'The Times' recently reported that, 'Fears that text messaging may have ruined the ability of teenagers to write properly have been shown to be unfounded after a two year study revealed that youngsters are more literate than ever before.' I admit I didn't read the newspaper; it was sent to my phone as a SMS news update and I accessed it that way.

The research does not shock me. It makes sense. Writing is a skill and the more practice you have, the better you get at it. Texting exercises those skills and so it's got to be better than spending hours on the phone saying 'nothing', which is what teenagers in the pre mobile era were all too frequently accused of.

Texting has allowed people to exchange information and communicate at both national and international level. The potential to provide some of the poorest people in the world with local, relevant, useful information has to be of benefit. Patients receive reminders to take their medicine, saving time and money travelling to local clinics. Farmers receive details of market prices and demand for their products before heading off to the market. National parks communicate details of dangerous animals,

providing an early warning system to mitigate against human/wildlife conflict. Young people living in the slums of Nairobi receive texts alerting them to job opportunities in the city.

Texting can save lives and provide just-in-time information during crises. We saw this with the Asian Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the London Bombings, and September 11th. In these instances, SMS messages warned people of rising waters and new dangers; helped relief groups self-organise and mobilise; alerted victims to safe shelter and food and provided emotional comfort by connecting and locating loved ones. The potential is obvious and it's hard to imagine humanitarian and disaster relief organisations in the future not using SMS as part of their basic toolbox.

Texting also works where wires can't reach, and often functions even when regular cell phone service fails. Because mobile telecommunications are leapfrogging the constraints of fixed telecom infrastructure, the mobile phone is now the key technology to use and develop. The statistics speak volumes: the growth of mobile phone usage in Africa alone was 140% in the last 12 months.

I am not suggesting there are no drawbacks. I would not be so naive. Robberies have increased with mobile phones being a favourite target. Some children are being beaten up by their peers in order to steal their phones. Others are being picked on and humiliated because their phone is more of a brick than the latest sleek design. But hasn't this always been the case? Ten years ago it was designer trainers; before that it was Pokemon cards: the list goes on. Something will always be 'in fashion' and therefore sought after and it is human nature to be avaricious. Mobile phones have not created greed and the risks that come with it, but have taken the place of the last 'hot thing' that was lusted after.

Bullying is a clear source for concern and it must be traumatic to get an abusive text in what you think is the safety of your home; but when the sender does not even have the sense to withhold

their identity this provides hard evidence instead of one person's word against another's. The Police are able to prosecute more and more abuse by SMS without the victim having to go to Court to give evidence.

A final word of warning – having the wrong text alert sound must be guarded against and last month's number one hit or poor impressions of famous people should always be given a wide berth.

Texting is almost certainly here to stay and I am one member of the 'thumb tribe' who is pleased that it is. Anyway, g2g but I hope I made you lol.

Commentary

This discursive piece demonstrates features that are characteristic of Exceptional Performance.

- The writer engages the reader immediately by starting with a very confident statement and by using humour.
- The writer displays a real ability to argue using a range of persuasive techniques – rhetorical devices, the building up of examples, statistics, the acknowledgement that there is another side to the argument in paragraph 8, the 'management' of the reader, the appropriate tone, etc.
- Ambitious use of sophisticated sentence structure (for example the deliberate use of the minor sentence).
- Sophisticated vocabulary such as 'acronyms', 'infrastructure', 'avaricious', 'mitigate', 'traumatic'.
- The piece not ostentatious in any way and there is no suggestion of overreaching.
- The piece has an impressive structure – a direct and clear introduction, a well developed argument and a telling conclusion.
- The writer has produced a thoroughly enjoyable read, at once thought provoking and entertaining.

Way forward

- This student is clearly very comfortable with this task/subject. In terms of improvement there is not much by way of advice that can be offered given the high level of sophistication displayed here. The work is almost error free though there is an agreement error in the second sentence and 'develop' bullying (second paragraph) is not the best choice of word. The purpose of the work is clear and there is a strong sense of a peer group 'audience' throughout. It comfortably meets the Exceptional Performance criteria.



